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LADY SAXONDALE'S CRIMES

VOLUME XI

"AS SHE MOVES IN THE BEWITCHING DANCE"
Photogravure from original by Merrill

AS SHE MOVES IN THE BEWITCHING DANCE

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The Works of

George W. M. Reynolds

Lady Saxondale's Crimes

Volume I

The Mysteries of the Court of London

Privately Printed
For Members of
The Oxford Society
London Boston

De Luxe Edition

Of this edition, printed for members of The Oxford Society, but One Thousand copies have been issued, of which this is copy

No. 424

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REYNOLDS' WORKS

CHAPTER I

THE OLD MAN'S SECOND MARRIAGE

On the bank of the Trent, and within the border of Lincolnshire, stands Saxondale Castle. The edifice is of immense extent, formed of buildings surrounding two quadrangular courts, and which having been erected at different periods, exhibit various styles of architecture. When viewed from a distance, the long, irregular ranges of battlements and towers, frowning with a sort of gloomy grandeur above the river and over the landscape through which it winds its way, give the idea of a strongly fortified place, and though on a nearer approach this impression is scarcely diminished, yet a minute survey will show that while displaying the baronial architecture of bygone times, the edifice never was intended as a fortalice of defence.

The scenery amidst which it is situated is imposing and beautiful, giving to the entire mass of building and all its accompaniments an air truly picturesque. The long line of castellated structure forming the western side of the castle stands upon the very verge of the river's bank, and in some parts the masonry itself is washed by its limpid waters. The front of the edifice, which is at right angles with the stream, commands a southern view of sweeping valleys undulating like a rolling ocean of the brightest green, the uniformity of which is, however, broken by groves of a darker verdure, as if they were islands dotting the vast expanse. White cottages and village steeples, peeping from amongst the dense foliage of those woods, enhance the

picturesque beauty of the scene; and all those broad lands, far as the eye can reach, constitute the lordly domain of Saxondale.

On the eastern side of the castle, the one farthest removed from the river, two magnificent rows of ancient trees, evidently the growth of centuries, form an avenue beneath the luxuriant foliage of which it is sweet to find shelter from the scorching summer's sun, or to ramble in the refreshing coolness and mystic serenity of evening. This avenue borders the spacious gardens, in the centre of which there is a lake surrounded by ornamental buildings, and having an immense greenhouse at the farther extremity, all in a Gothic style, and harmonizing with the architecture of that side of the castle itself. Beyond the gardens, which are laid out with taste and elegance, lie the shrubberies and plantations, and thence the rolling landscape extends, as above described, until bounded by the horizon.

The interior of the castle requires a twofold description. One portion of it, namely, the whole of the front, and all that side overlooking the gardens, is used for the habitation of the inmates, and is fitted up with the sumptuous magnificence, refinement, and taste of modern splendour, yet in a manner to harmonize admirably with the antiquated style of the architecture. The doorways, the windows, the chimneypieces, and the cornices are all carved or sculptured in the richest manner, and are inwrought with armorial bearings and decorative devices. The entrance-hall is of immense extent, with a double row of marble pillars on each side, and having an elaborately groined ceiling. The pavement of this hall is of variegated marbles. At the extremity facing the high folding-doors at the entrance a magnificent staircase is seen rising to about the mid-height of the hall, and from that point it branches into two equally handsome flights, one winding to the right and the other to the left hand. One leads to the state apartments and drawing-rooms, the other to a landing whence open the library and picture-gallery. The walls all up these staircases are decorated with armorial devices, and ornamented with suits of armour and statues. From a long corridor, stretching the whole length of that line of the building which overlooks the gardens, and which is called the eastern side, open the sleeping-apartments intended for the family, visitors, and

guests. The chambers of the numerous dependents communicate from a similar gallery overhead.

So much for the inhabited portion of Saxondale Castle, but the whole of the western side, overlooking the river, and that end which may be termed the back of the building, have long been disused. They are the most ancient parts of the castellated structure, but the rooms which they contain are attended to with great care, and are shown as curiosities to all guests visiting the castle. These rooms appear to have been furnished and to have been fitted up in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, blending the rude contrivances of the two latter Henrys' time with the more refined improvements of the Elizabethan age. The walls of many of these disused apartments are hung with tapestry, for the most part torn and tattered; the furniture consists of similar tapestry-work or Utrecht velvet covering the oaken chairs, some of which are elaborately carved. But to preserve this furniture and tapestry from falling into complete decay, frequent fires are lighted in the rooms, and constant attention is paid to them.

One or two more features in Saxondale Castle must be mentioned ere we enter upon our story. The first is the chapel, which is situated in the western side, overlooking the River Trent. Not having been used as a place of worship for some centuries, its Catholic appearance has not been disturbed. The altar-piece, with all its Roman emblems and appurtenances, has therefore been preserved with as much jealous care as the tapestried chambers in the same part of the building. There are several fine old pictures, representing sacred subjects, in this chapel, and in the vestiary are preserved some interesting specimens of Roman Catholic canonical costume. From this vestiary a low door opens upon a dark, narrow, and precipitate staircase, made of stone and winding down the circular shaft of a tower. At the bottom of this staircase there are vaults stretching to a considerable distance beneath the western side, and even under the bed of the river. These subterraneans were doubtless used as places of penance, perhaps even of more terrible punishment, in those Catholic times when a portion of Saxondale Castle was tenanted by the holy fathers of a monkish order.

In a cloister branching out from the chapel, and on the

same level with it, are several tombs and monuments, enclosing the remains of some of the earlier scions of the house of Saxondale. In the middle of this cloister stands a colossal figure, carved in black marble, representing a warrior in complete armour with his vizor closed, and reputed to have been the image of the founder of the Saxondale family in the earliest times of the Tudors. The appearance of this giant statue, in its sable gloom, but in a natural, lifelike attitude, with the left hand upon the hip, and the right arm extended as if menacingly pointing toward the door, is well calculated to produce a startling effect upon the visitor who, unwarned of its presence there, enters that cloister for the first time, and beholds the colossal image uprearing its huge form in the midst of the dim cathedral light which pervades the place.

The reader must not fancy that from this long description of Saxondale Castle we are about to entertain him with the gloomy mysticism or the dark horrors of a romance of the olden time; but it was necessary for the purposes of our narrative to record these details in respect to the ancestral seat of a family which is destined to play no mean part upon the stage of our story. Without further preface, therefore, we will proceed to state that in the year 1825 does our narrative open.

At that period Lord Saxondale, the owner of the castle and its immense domain, was a nobleman well stricken in years, but who had recently married a very young wife by whom he had three children. This was his second marriage, and it is necessary that we should inform the reader how and under what circumstances it came to be contracted.

Lord Saxondale had long been a widower and also childless, the presumptive heir to his title and estates being his nephew, the Honourable Mr. Ralph Farefield. Ralph was an only child, and his birth cost his mother her life. His father, who was Lord Saxondale's younger brother, died soon afterward of a fever, and the infant orphan was left entirely dependent upon his noble uncle. Lord Saxondale accepted the sacred trust generously, and, having then no children of his own, brought up his nephew with as much love and affection as if he were his son. His lordship habitually resided at his palatial mansion in London, paying an annual visit of two or three months to his castle in Lincolnshire; and

as he was wont to be excessively indulgent toward his nephew, the latter, when his education was finished and he left college, plunged into all the dissipations and debaucheries of London life. For some time the old nobleman seemed unconscious of the evil courses which his nephew Ralph was pursuing, but at length he received such intimation thereof — either from well-intentioned friends or mischief-making gossips — that he was induced to watch the young man's proceedings.

One inquiry led on to another, and Lord Saxondale succeeded in unravelling such a complicated skein of vices, profligacies, and even villainies on the part of his nephew, that he recoiled in horror from the frightful discovery. He learned that Ralph was an inveterate gamester, a cold-blooded seducer of innocence, and a profligate of the most unscrupulous character; that speculating upon the certainty of inheriting the title and entailed estates of Saxondale, he had borrowed large sums of usurers; and that he had even been heard to drop dark hints "that if his old uncle did not soon take his departure from this world, he would adopt means to send him prematurely out of it." This might have been mere idle talk or wretched bravado on Ralph's part, but certain it is that the discovery of the young man's base ingratitude produced a powerful impression upon the old lord. He did not pause to reflect whether his own exceeding indulgence might not have been mainly instrumental in plunging Ralph Farefield into the vortex of dissipation, but, being a man of very strong feelings and of decided character, Lord Saxondale suddenly became as stern and implacable as he had previously been affectionate and foolishly indulgent.

All this investigation into Ralph Farefield's conduct had been conducted unknown to the young man himself, and while he was pursuing his pleasures and his debaucheries, he little suspected the storm that was brewing over his head. At length it burst. One morning, just as daylight was making the street-lamps burn dim and sickly, Ralph was endeavouring to effect his usual stealthy entrance by a back door into Saxondale Mansion in Park Lane, London, when he was suddenly encountered by his uncle's steward, who put a letter into his hand and peremptorily bade him quit the house. Half-intoxicated as Ralph was at the time,

this unexpected proceeding sobered him in an instant, and tearing open the letter, he was astounded at its contents. These were laconic enough. They merely gave the young man to understand that everything was known, that thenceforth he was never again to appear in his uncle's presence, and that an income of three hundred pounds a year was all that would be allowed him for the future. Recovering from the stupor into which this letter for the moment threw him, Ralph burst forth into a volley of the bitterest invectives against his uncle, adding, as he addressed himself to the steward, "Go and tell the old curmudgeon that I don't care a fig for him. His estates are entailed and go along with the title, so it is but a little matter of time, and then I shall have all. In the interval I can raise plenty of money on post-obit bonds in the City, and therefore I repel with scorn the miserable pittance of three hundred a year which the old boy offers me."

With these words Ralph flung out of the house, and hastened away to rejoin his boon companions and report to them all that had taken place. They applauded his spirit, and he plunged more deeply into dissipation and debauchery than ever. But in the meantime the old steward, who was a matter-of-fact kind of person, and never a sincere friend toward Ralph Farefield, proceeded to give Lord Saxondale a full and faithful account of all that his nephew had said, not even suppressing a single oath, nor one tittle of the indignities, threats, or defiances which the ungrateful young man had levelled against his uncle.

"Oh," said Lord Saxondale, his mind at once made up how to act, "instead of contrition we have such conduct as this, have we? Let the travelling-carriage be prepared, and within an hour I shall start for Lincolnshire."

The old lord, who was just sixty years of age when this rupture with his nephew took place, had suddenly come to the determination of taking unto himself a second wife, in the hope that she might give him an heir to his possessions and title, and thus destroy the prospects of Mr. Ralph Farefield. While rolling along in his commodious travelling-carriage to Saxondale Castle, his lordship, who could be as vindictive on the one hand as he had proved himself indulgent and generous on the other, gloated over the project which he had formed, and which became strengthened

in his mind the longer he deliberated upon it. Who his intended wife was to be he had already settled with himself, for he knew full well that where the offer of his hand was about to be made it was certain to be accepted.

The young lady whom he thus had in view was seventeen years of age. She was the only child of a worthy clergyman occupying a living on the Saxondale estate, and for which he was indebted to his lordship's bounty. Harriet Clifton was a girl of exceeding beauty, tall and admirably formed, and with a development of womanly charms which made her seem three or four years older than she really was. She possessed a fine spirit, a powerful intellect, and a strong mind, all of which were indicated, young though she were, by the cast and expression of her countenance. Indeed, it was only necessary to look into the depths of her dark eyes when they met the gaze steadfastly and fearlessly, to follow the aquiline lines of her handsome profile, to contemplate the high, proud forehead, to mark the haughty curling of the lip, the swanlike archings of the neck, the statuesque carriage of the figure, and the sedate and somewhat measured step, in order to read the firm decision of her character as easily as if it were printed in a book. At the same time there was nothing unfeminine in the appearance nor improperly bold in the manner of Harriet Clifton. Her forwardness was attempered by an unstudied ingenuousness, and the settled decision of her looks was the natural precocity of a very powerful mind, shedding its influence upon her whole being, and giving its own strong impress to her features. Having lost her mother when she was very young, and having a kind, indulgent father, Harriet had received none of those delicate tutorings and refined teachings, those timely checks upon temper and those repressions of self-will, which only a mother or a very near and affectionate female relative can give. She was well educated, ladylike in manners, and possessing good conversational powers, the development of which had been hindered by no bashful coyness. Thus, altogether, Harriet Clifton was a woman in form, mind, and intellect at that age of "sweet seventeen" when she was still a mere girl in years.

Lord Saxondale had been acquainted with the Reverend Mr. Clifton for a quarter of a century, and had therefore known Harriet from her birth. He was well aware of all

the points in her character, all its strength and all its self-willed firmness; and though he had frequently thought, when regarding her with a kind of paternal feeling, that she was more precocious than he should like a daughter of his own to be, yet now that he wanted a second wife, he felt assured that Harriet was the very being who would best suit him. He knew that she was good and virtuous, but that she was ambitious, that she possessed a heart which was capable of the noble feeling of gratitude where it was not likely that she could entertain the softer sentiment of love; and he moreover calculated that if his projected marriage with this damsel should crown his most fervid hope and give him an heir, her resolute and haughty spirit would serve, when he himself should be no more, as an efficient defence to shield her offspring against any open hostility or secret snares on the part of Ralph Farefield.

Such was the tenor of Lord Saxondale's musings as he rolled along in his travelling-chariot to Lincolnshire. He arrived at the castle safe and sound that evening, and the very next day he sent to invite Mr. Clifton and Harriet to pass a week with him. They came, little suspecting what was in store; but after dinner, on the first day of their arrival, and when Harriet had retired to the drawing-room, Lord Saxondale unfolded his purpose without much circumlocution, and over a bottle of excellent claret. Mr. Clifton at first could scarcely believe his own ears, next he thought his lordship was joking, and then he concluded that he must be mad. But Lord Saxondale speedily convinced him that he was neither jesting nor insane, and long before the bottle of claret was emptied, the matter was duly settled, — it being taken for granted that Miss Harriet would give her consent. Nothing was said to the young lady that evening, but next day her father introduced the subject to her notice. There was no necessity to wait for a verbal reply from her lips. The flash of triumph in her eyes, the glow mantling upon her cheeks, and the swell of her fine bust proved how joyous was her exultation, and how proudly she could become the position of Lady Saxondale.

At the expiration of a fortnight the marriage took place at Mr. Clifton's own church, and Harriet became the mistress of that magnificent castle which, as a guest, she had so often admired, and with every part of which she was already so

familiar. The intelligence of this marriage, when it reached Ralph Farefield for the first time through the newspapers, did not produce the overwhelming effect which his vindictive uncle gloatingly anticipated, for the graceless nephew thought it most unlikely indeed that any issue would result from so unequal an alliance. He therefore continued his career of dissipation, raising money by whatsoever means he could, and flattering himself that he was displaying a proper spirit by doggedly abstaining from making any advances toward a reconciliation with his uncle. But at the expiration of a twelvemonth Ralph began to grow alarmed, when he learned that Lady Saxondale had presented her husband with a daughter. Still he consoled himself that it was not a son, and that he was still heir presumptive to the title and estates of Saxondale. Nevertheless, to drown the misgivings which would at times intrude upon his soul, he plunged more deeply, if possible, into dissipation than ever; and finding it growing more and more difficult to procure funds for his extravagance, he saw his aristocratic companions proportionately falling off. At the expiration of a couple more years the newspapers informed him that Lady Saxondale had become a mother a second time, but also of a daughter; and though Ralph's uneasiness now increased materially, he continued to solace himself as well as he was able with the fact that he was still heir to the broad lands and lordly title of Saxondale.

But now Ralph Farefield found it no longer possible to raise money with the usurers on any terms, and he was involved in the most serious embarrassments. All his friends deserted him; but not being able to exist without the companionship of the profligate and the dissolute, he was compelled to seek the society of a lower grade of debauchees than those with whom he had been wont to associate. Thus was he rapidly sinking down in the social scale, and being reduced to positive want, he at length penned a letter of contrition to his uncle. But Lord Saxondale, who since his marriage had resided altogether with his young wife in Lincolnshire, had not lost sight of his nephew even from that distance; or, more properly speaking, he received from his solicitors in London, and from other sources, frequent accounts of the young man's proceedings. These accounts had only tended to confirm him in the loathing and

hatred which he had conceived for the graceless debauchee, and he accordingly returned Ralph's letter without a comment. Stung to the quick by what he termed this heartless insult, and goaded to desperation by his necessities, Ralph Farefield began seriously to think of some deadly revenge against his uncle. Nevertheless, the pressure of circumstances compelled him to go and draw from Lord Saxondale's bankers all those arrears of income which he had hitherto scornfully left untouched; and as more than three years had now elapsed since he was discarded, he had nine hundred pounds to receive. Forgetting for the moment his thoughts of vengeance, he plunged headlong once more into dissipation; but he was shortly startled from his debaucheries by the astounding intelligence that Lady Saxondale was a third time a mother, and on this occasion had presented her husband with a son. Ralph Farefield was consequently no longer the heir to a lordly title and vast estate; but then, as he observed to his dissolute associates, "it was but a miserable new-born babe that stood between him and the hope of still inheriting the ancestral wealth and honours."

We have now explained to the reader how it was and under what peculiar circumstances the venerable Lord Saxondale contracted a second marriage at the age of sixty. Four years had elapsed since the day when he led Harriet Clifton to the altar, and he was consequently now sixty-four. This was the year 1825, when in the earlier part of the chapter we first introduced his lordship to the reader. Lady Saxondale was at this time a splendid woman, and she filled her exalted position with as much graceful dignity as if she had been from her very birth reared in the atmosphere of aristocracy and fashion. Not once did the old nobleman regret having married her; for not merely was his vindictive feeling against his nephew at length gratified by the birth of an heir, but he had also experienced much real domestic happiness in his recurrence to a wedded state. For, as he had foreseen, his wife regarded him with gratitude as the author of the brilliant position to which she had been raised; and though she could not positively love a man old enough to be her grandfather, nor indeed had a heart susceptible of the tender feeling at all, yet she behaved toward him with kindness, and was ever solicitous for his comfort and well-being.

Lady Saxondale was a woman of passions, but not of sentiments; the former were strong in proportion as they occupied the place which the latter ought to have held in her soul, and those passions being egotistical and selfish, as all passions necessarily are, were equally capable of prompting her to generous and good actions as to a course the very reverse. Circumstances had therefore favoured the former alternative, and as she was ambitious, she felt grateful to the man who had ministered to her ambition. She now felt, too, that she occupied the proud position of the mother of that heir to whom her husband's title and estates would fall; and also cherishing the hope that there was but little chance of these estates passing away from her own offspring, she felt a pride in contemplating the responsibility connected with her position. These feelings not merely made her cherish the husband who had given her this position and had invested her, as it were, with this proud responsibility, but they also imparted a certain matronly sedateness to her mind and demeanour, so that at one and twenty, Lady Saxondale, while still in the bloom of youthful beauty, possessed the experience and bore the air of a woman of several years older. But lest we should be misunderstood in any portion of these remarks, we must observe that the lapse of those four years since her marriage, so far from having in any way marred her loveliness, had tended only to develop her charms to the height of their splendour, and to convert a precocious girlhood into a grand and magnificent womanhood.

The reader is already aware that three children were the fruit of her marriage with Lord Saxondale. The two eldest were girls, and were respectively christened Juliana and Constance; the last-born, now a couple of months old, was named Edmund. In respect to the infant babe, we must observe that he was marked on the shoulder with a strawberry. This mark was but very small, still in its diminutive proportions it bore an extraordinary resemblance to the above-named fruit; and of course the old nurse, the female servants, and the gossips of the neighbourhood were positive in declaring that Lady Saxondale must have longed for strawberries ere the birth of her son. Be this as it may, it is not the less certain that the mark was there upon the child's shoulder; and her ladyship congratulated herself that

it was thus upon a part of the body where it could not be considered a disfigurement.

Such was the exact position of affairs with regard to the Saxondale family in the middle of the year 1825, at which date our narrative opened.

CHAPTER II

THE CRIME

Ralph Farefield was, as we have already observed, startled from what may be termed the lethargy of a continuous debauch upon receiving the intelligence that Lady Saxondale had presented her husband with a son and heir. He suddenly became an altered man, and throwing aside his dissipated habits, as he would a garment which he had worn long enough, he began not merely to deliberate with calmness, but also to act with decision. His acquaintance with the low dens of debauchery in London had taught him where, in case of need, he could lay his hands upon the desperate characters suited to his purpose, and these he was not long in finding out. In the first instance he despatched a secret emissary down into Lincolnshire, who was instructed to prowl about Saxondale Castle and take note of any circumstances which might tend to forward the scheme that Ralph Farefield had in view. This was nothing more or less than to carry off the infant Edmund, and make away with him. The emissary was accordingly instructed to watch when the child was taken out for an airing, where it was so taken, by whom, and whether its nurse ever walked to any distance from the immediate precincts of the castle. The man whom Ralph employed on this service was astute, cunning, and wary, and promised to fulfil his mission with despatch and fidelity.

Profligate and unprincipled as Ralph Farefield was, bitter as were his vindictive feelings against his uncle, and his hatred for Lady Saxondale, deep, too, as was the stake which he had to play, he nevertheless recoiled from the idea of committing murder with his own hand. He shrank thus, not merely from that instinctive horror of shedding blood,

which, when the idea is first conceived, seizes upon even the most unprincipled and unscrupulous, but he was likewise afraid of involving himself in the trammels of the law. His plan, therefore, was to consummate the entire iniquity, not with his own hands, but through the medium of agents; and as he purposed to remain in London and show himself daily and hourly at his usual places of resort, while the tragedy was being enacted in the country, he felt assured that even though suspicion might seem to point to him as the author of the atrocity, yet it would be impossible to bring the crime home to his door. As for what public opinion might surmise or say, he was utterly reckless; it was sufficient for him to destroy the barrier that at present existed between himself and the splendid heritage for which he was prepared to plunge his soul into crime.

But the plans and calculations of this wicked young man did not stop here; for he reasoned that if the son and heir was once removed, the loss would either break old Lord Saxondale's heart, or, if he should survive it, then another crime, perpetrated under circumstances as guarded and as precautionary as the first, would at once sweep away every obstacle to the fulfilment of his hopes.

As we have already said, the requisite agents for Ralph Farefield's purposes did not appear to be wanting; and out of the money drawn from the bankers he had still enough left to bribe them. Besides, the fourth year was just passed, and he had another three hundred pounds to receive. The means for executing his plans were therefore in his possession.

Amongst the desperate characters whom he had sought out from the vile dens in London was one whom he specially intended to be the principal agent in the tragic enterprise. This was a ruffian whose name was Chiffin, and who was called the Cannibal. The origin of this odious nickname may be explained in a few words. Chiffin was the son of respectable parents, who reared him well, gave him a decent education, and apprenticed him to a trade; but when seventeen or eighteen, he ran away and went to sea. The ship in which he embarked was engaged in the South American trade; and when crossing the Pacific it was overtaken by a violent tempest, so that in a very short time it became a complete wreck. The greater portion of the crew were drowned, but some six or seven men succeeded in getting

away in a boat. Amongst these survivors was Chiffin. The small stock of provisions they had managed to bring from the wreck was very soon exhausted, and for several days they were tossed about on the broad ocean, enduring all the horrible pangs of hunger and thirst. At length a whisper passed around amongst them, and they agreed to cast lots who should die to furnish food for the rest. The lot fell upon the boatswain, and he resigned himself to his fate. The dreadful work of death was done, the man was murdered. But when the horrible tragedy was accomplished, an immitigable sense of loathing seized upon all the survivors, save one individual, and this one was Chiffin. He alone partook of the loathsome meal.

Within a few hours afterward a vessel came in sight, and the shipwrecked wretches were taken on board; but, remaining faithful to an oath which they had sworn previous to the casting of the lots, the dreadful tale of murder was not divulged; and as all traces of the crime had been cleared away from the boat ere it reached the ship, it was not suspected. In due course the vessel arrived in England, and Chiffin, finding that his father and his mother had died of grief during his absence, was thrown loose upon the world. He became the associate of the vilest of the vile in the low dens and infamous neighbourhoods of London; and by the desperate ruffianism of his character, his daring exploits, his success in eluding the officers of justice, and his lavish expenditure of his ill-gotten gains, he was looked up to as a sort of chief or ruler amongst his companions. In the course of time the terrible tale relative to the murdered boatswain got abroad, either being whispered by one of Chiffin's comrades on the occasion, or else vauntingly proclaimed by himself when in his cups, and thus the horrible appendage of Cannibal was joined to his name.

Such was the dreadful character whom Ralph Farefield selected as the principal agent in his own murderous design. We must observe that Chiffin the Cannibal was now about four and twenty years of age, of middle height and muscular form, with a countenance of so diabolical an expression that were it possessed by the most honest man in existence it would be quite enough to hang him, though innocent, at the very first whisper charging him with an offence. There was something of such unredeemed ferocity, something

so awfully repulsive, something so bloodthirsty and cruel, in Chiffin's look, that to meet him even in the crowded street and at broad noonday would startle the most courageous and self-possessed. Indeed, Ralph Farefield himself could never look upon this man without experiencing a cold chill creep over him and penetrate to his very heart's core; but yet he admitted him into his confidence, because he was just the unscrupulous demon fitted for his purpose.

By the time all Ralph's arrangements were made with Chiffin the Cannibal, the emissary returned from Lincolnshire, and gave such a report that there seemed not the slightest doubt of being enabled to carry the nefarious project into successful execution. Chiffin accordingly set off for Lincolnshire, simultaneously with three of his most faithful confederates. They took different routes, so as to avoid suspicion, but having previously settled upon the point where they were to meet in the neighbourhood of Saxondale. Chiffin's instructions were positive and fearfully definite. The child was to be carried off from its nurse, put to death by means of a poison procured for the purpose, and then left in some public place or thoroughfare where it was sure to be discovered, so that its death might be a fact not merely established but also of notoriety.

True to the plan which he had chalked out, Ralph Farefield now appeared in such public places in London as to secure the certainty of a host of witnesses being enabled to testify that he did not at this period quit the metropolis even for a single day. He passed the forenoon at billiard-tables, visited Tattersall's and the parks in the afternoon, dined in the evening in the coffee-rooms of hotels, and spent the greater portion of his nights at gaming-tables. Thus ten days passed, during which interval he endured no small amount of suspense. He had forbidden his villainous agents to communicate with him by letter, for fear of miscarriage or any other accident which might lead to discovery; and thus during these ten days he knew nothing of what passed. At the expiration of that time he received an intimation that Chiffin had returned to London, and he at once proceeded to the low public-house, or boozing-ken, where he was to meet that dreadful man. On arriving at the place of appointment, he found Chiffin alone in a private room, and as the ruffian's countenance was too diabolical to betray any deeper vil-

lainy than those crimes which had already stamped it with their Cain-brand, Ralph could glean little or nothing from his looks.

" Well, is the deed done? " he immediately asked, for suspense was torturing him.

" It is, and well done," answered Chiffin, in the hollow, sepulchral voice that was natural to him. " Too well done to want doing over again."

" Give me the particulars," said Farefield, now experiencing strange sensations of mingled hope and terror, joy and alarm, a terrible state of feeling which made the frame glow with a heat and yet shiver with a chill at the same time, as if the veins ran lightning while an ice-snake coiled itself around the body.

" Oh, the story is short enough," answered Chiffin, who was making his shabby white hat, with a black crape, turn around on the top of his huge bludgeon, as he lolled negligently in a Windsor chair. " I and the other chaps met according to appointment at the village down yonder, and, having settled our plans, we dispersed ourselves about in the neighbourhood of the castle, hiding ourselves in such places as were convenient. Three or four days passed before we could do anything, as the baby was only taken out in the carriage along with the old lord and his wife. And, by the bye, isn't her ladyship a beauty? But of course you know her? "

" I have not seen her for some years," answered Ralph, impatiently. " Never mind such matters as those. Tell me what nearest concerns me."

" Well, then, when four or five days had passed, and nothing was done, I began to grow uncomfortable, for I thought that four queer-looking gentlemen like me and my mates lurking about in the neighbourhood might seem suspicious; so I made them tramp off to a distance, while I stayed to do the business by myself."

" Ah! that was more politic," exclaimed Ralph. " But go on."

" Well, as luck would have it," continued the Cannibal, " the very next day, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, the two nurse-maids came out to walk near the river. The three children were with 'em. One of them carried the baby, the other one carried the next child, and the third little

brat — the eldest, of course — walked by the side of the maid who was carrying her sister. There was I, hid safe enough in the midst of a clump of trees, watching my opportunity to spring, just like a wild beast in one of those Indian jungles that I used to read about when I was at school. Well, the nurse-maid carrying the baby came on in front, and the other lagged behind. The very thing that I wanted; nothing could be better. So I waited till the maid with the baby had rounded the clump of trees, if you understand, in such a way that she was hid by them from the view of her companion. Then I sprang out, with a black mask over my face. My eyes, what a squeal the girl gave! And as I snatched the child from her, she dropped down just as if she was shot. Whether she was killed stone-dead with fright, or only fell into a swoon, I don't know," added Chiffin, coolly, " and don't much care. You may depend upon it, I didn't wait to see."

" Go on, go on," said Ralph, with feverish impatience.

" Ah! I did go on then, too," continued the Cannibal, with a grin. " You should have seen me scud along the bank of the river with the child in my arms, that's all. I don't suppose I looked very paternal, though. However, there I was, cutting along at a breakneck rate; but soon reaching a wood, I stopped and rested myself. Then I cut away again; and when I thought that everything like pursuit was impossible, and that I might put the finishing stroke upon the business where I was, I just poured half a dozen drops of that stuff down the child's throat, and, by jingo! it was all over with it in a moment."

" Ah! " slowly said Ralph Farefield, letting the deep breath of suspense escape him. " Then you really have done it? "

" Why, didn't I tell you so at the very first? " demanded Chiffin the Cannibal, his hollow tones now filled with a savage growl, as if he thought that he was suspected. " You don't think, do you, that a chap like me would mind making mince-meat of a baby like that when it's necessary? "

" No, no, I did not mean to offend you," Farefield hastened to observe.

" Why, it's enough to hurt one's dignity," still growled Chiffin, " to think for a moment that one wouldn't do such a miserable little bit of business as that."

" But what became of the body? How did you dispose of it? Where did you put it? " demanded Ralph, with renewed impatience.

" I waited in the wood till night came," answered the ruffian, " and then I went and put the little stiff'un down at the door of a cottage about five or six miles from the castle. But now for the proofs," continued the Cannibal, thrusting his hand into the capacious pocket of the great rough, shaggy coat which hung loosely upon him, and he produced all the upper garments that were likely to have clothed a babe of a couple of months old.

Ralph seized them with avidity, and eagerly scrutinized each corner for some sign or symbol that should identify them as having belonged to his infant cousin. Nor did he search in vain. The cloak was elaborately embroidered with designs representing a peer's coronet, and also the arms of the Saxondale family, while upon another garment the name of the Honourable Edmund Farefield was likewise worked in delicate embroidery.

" Now are you satisfied? " asked the Cannibal, his eyes leering horribly from beneath his dark, overhanging brows. " But I can tell you more. When I stripped off that toggery from the tiny brat, I saw the mark of a strawberry on its shoulder, as plain as if it was a real one — but very small, though — that had been cut in halves, and one-half stuck on to its flesh not so big as a sixpence."

" I am satisfied, quite satisfied," exclaimed Farefield. Then, as he pushed the garments across the table to Chiffin, he said, " You must dispose of these as you think fit. But perhaps it will be best to burn them."

" Leave that to me," answered the fellow, gathering up the things and thrusting them down into his capacious pocket. " Any further orders, Mr. Farefield? Anything more in my little way? "

" Not at present," rejoined Ralph. " But do not be out of the way in case I should require you at any time during the next few weeks."

" You can always hear of me at this place," said the Cannibal. " You remember the sign? It's the Billy Goat."

" I shall not forget. And now," added Farefield, " for the remainder of the reward that was agreed upon between us."

Thereupon he counted down a quantity of gold upon the table; and as Chiffin consigned the wages of iniquity to his pocket, his hideous countenance again expressed its satisfaction with a ferocious leer.

Ralph Farefield and his agent in crime then separated, the former hurrying away to some place of public resort, which he still deemed it prudent to frequent; and the latter proceeding to the tap-room of the boozing-ken, there to expend a portion of his gains in a deep carouse.

CHAPTER III

THE HEIR

Return we now to Saxondale Castle, the inmates of which were thrown into the utmost grief, consternation, and dismay by the daring theft of the child. The nurse-maid from whom the infant Edmund had been stolen gave an account of the transaction similar to that which Chiffin the Cannibal gave to Ralph Farefield. She said that while walking on, a little in front of the other servant, and while following the circuitous bend of the pathway which wound around a knot of trees standing on the river's bank about a quarter of a mile from the castle, a man with a black mask on his face suddenly rushed forth from amidst those trees, and, tearing the child forcibly from her arms, sped away. She shrieked out and fell down senseless. It further appeared that the other nurse-maid, hearing the cry, hastened to the spot, and was horror-stricken on finding her fellow servant lying, as she thought, dead, and the infant gone. She caught sight of the ruffian just as he was springing over a hedge at some distance, and then he disappeared from her view. When recovering her presence of mind, she ascertained that her companion was not dead, but only in a swoon, and dipping her handkerchief into the river, she applied it to her countenance, and by those means brought her back to consciousness. Both the servant-maids, with the two remaining children, then hastened back as quickly as they could to the castle, and gave the alarm.

As we above stated, and as may easily be supposed, the consternation and grief caused by the astounding intelligence were immense. Lady Saxondale was at first absolutely petrified, but the old lord gave way to the most frenzied anguish. Her ladyship soon recovered her presence of mind,

and the male dependents of the household were despatched in every direction in search of the lost infant. Some mounted horses and galloped away to beat the country, others set off on foot, and everything was done that the circumstances suggested to recover the stolen heir and capture the daring thief. Having issued her orders to this effect with a wonderful degree of calmness and self-possession, Lady Saxondale turned her attention to her afflicted husband, and endeavoured to console him by the representation that as these various measures had been adopted so soon after the theft, it was next to impossible that they could fail in achieving the desired result. But in her heart Lady Saxondale was really tortured by the sorest misgivings, and she apprehended the very worst. Both her own suspicions and those of her husband had at once very naturally fallen upon Ralph Farefield; but while the old lord could not bring himself to fancy anything so horrible as that his nephew would cause the child to be made away with, his wife, on the other hand, was unable to close her eyes to that dreadful eventuality.

Slowly, and oh, how miserably passed the hours until night came, and then as one by one the servants returned without having obtained the slightest clue to the missing heir, Lord Saxondale began to yield to the same appalling terrors which his wife had already experienced. It was midnight ere all the messengers came back, and when the last made his appearance, with nothing better to report than the rest, the old lord again gave way to all the frantic bitterness of his grief. For awhile, too, even Lady Saxondale's firmness of mind seemed to abandon her, and they mingled their tears, their sobs, and the outpourings of their hearts' agony, that old man and his young wife.

But Lady Saxondale was the first to regain her fortitude and her self-possession, and she exerted all her powers to impart some solace to her husband. She now declared that, all things considered, she was persuaded in her own mind that Ralph Farefield, who, no doubt, was at the bottom of the atrocity, would not dare commit so heinous a crime as murder, nor yet allow it to be done, but that he had most probably caused the child to be carried off, in order to bring his uncle to terms and wring from him immense pecuniary concessions. In this strain did her ladyship continue to

argue for a long time, and with so much outward earnestness, if not with an equal inward sincerity, that Lord Saxondale, eagerly catching at any straw of hope, gladly took refuge from the worst apprehensions in the adoption of his wife's theory. Thus the night passed, for no pillow was pressed by that couple throughout the long, weary hours. When morning dawned, the servants were all again dispersed over the neighbourhood, to make every kind of inquiry that might possibly tend to the recovery of the lost one.

All the villages, hamlets, and isolated cottages, within a circuit of a dozen miles, were visited during this day, and when night came again and the servants returned, the meagre results of their inquiries amounted to these facts: that for the last few days some ill-looking men had been observed in the vicinage of the castle, that they had disappeared suddenly, and that a gang of gipsies had been also seen in those parts. But whether there was any connection between the former and the latter it was impossible to say. As for the child, not the slightest trace had been discovered, and whether the poor infant was dead or alive seemed wrapped up in the darkest mystery. Finally, all the intelligence obtained went to prove that Mr. Ralph Farefield, who was well known in the neighbourhood, had not been seen by a single soul who was acquainted with him.

Lady Saxondale's resolution how to act was now promptly taken. She declared her intention of repairing at once to London, — not in an open manner, or for the purpose of calling on Ralph and taxing him with the crime of having had the child stolen, but of proceeding there in a private manner, under an assumed name, and with the object of instituting such inquiries as circumstances might suggest. Lord Saxondale proposed to accompany her, but she besought him to abandon such an idea. In the first place, he was so well known that his presence in the metropolis could scarcely be kept a secret from his nephew; in the second place, the researches in Lincolnshire must be persevered in, and it was therefore requisite for him to be upon the spot to superintend them; and in the third place, it was better for him to remain at Saxondale in case Ralph Farefield should forward any communication with the view of bringing him to terms, her ladyship still declaring her conviction that to this end had the atrocious outrage been perpetrated. To

these reasonings on the part of her ladyship did the old lord yield; and, devoured with grief though he was, well-nigh broken-hearted, too, by the terrible calamity, he could not help complimenting his wife upon her calmness, her fortitude, and her good sense under such distressing circumstances.

Lady Saxondale's principal tirewoman was a person of about thirty years of age, discreet, prudent, and cool-headed, one on whom reliance could be placed, and who was in every way qualified to share in a task requiring activity, energy, and determination. Her ladyship therefore resolved upon taking Mabel, for such was the woman's name, with her to London. A plain travelling-carriage was got in readiness without delay, a few articles of the simplest apparel were packed up, and Lady Saxondale, accompanied by Mabel, took her departure for the metropolis.

In a couple of days Lord Saxondale received a letter from his wife announcing her safe arrival in London, and stating that she had engaged humble but comfortable lodgings, at the house of a respectable widow lady of the name of Ferney, where she passed under the name of Smith. At the expiration of a week his lordship received a second letter, to the effect that his wife had already made discoveries of importance, that there was everything to hope, but that she could not enter into any particulars, not only through fear of the letter being intercepted, but likewise because every moment of her time was given up to the sacred task in which she was engaged. Some days later his lordship received a third letter, containing the joyful intelligence that Lady Saxondale had succeeded in ascertaining, beyond all possibility of doubt, that their beloved child was alive, though she had not as yet discovered where he was. She concluded by recommending her husband to keep the contents of her letters altogether to himself, as secrecy was, for the present, of the utmost consequence. The effect of this letter was to produce such a revulsion of feeling, from torturing suspense to ardent hope, and from harrowing fears to joyous anticipations, that the excitement proved too much for the old nobleman, and he became dangerously ill. The usual medical attendant was summoned, and Mr. Clifton, Lady Saxondale's father, was sent for; but in spite of their earnest solicitations, his lordship would not permit them to write

to Lady Saxondale, for fear that she should at once hurry home and abandon the search that was progressing so favourably in London.

In a week or ten days he got somewhat better; and then came another communication from his wife, announcing the joyous intelligence that she had discovered where their child was, that circumstances, which she would hereafter explain, prevented her from applying for the assistance of a magistrate in the affair, but that in a very few days she hoped to regain possession of the lost darling. This letter produced a most disastrous effect upon Lord Saxondale, illustrating the well-known proverb that happiness is sometimes as pernicious as misfortune in its influence upon the physical frame. The old nobleman suffered a relapse, and for some hours was in a dangerous condition. But when somewhat restored again, he still persisted in refusing to allow his wife to be written to; nor would he even say where she was, and as he carefully destroyed her letters the moment he had read them so as to prevent them falling into other hands, Mr. Clifton was unable to discover the slightest clue to his daughter's present abode.

But in the meantime what was Ralph Farefield doing in London? Since his interview with Chiffin at the boozing-ken he had regularly visited a coffee-house where the Lincolnshire newspapers were filed, in the hope of reading in their columns an account of the " mysterious murder " of the infant heir of Saxondale, and " discovery of the corpse." But a paragraph of a few lines, containing merely the fact that the child had been stolen from its nurse, was all that at first appeared in the local journals. On the occasion of each fresh arrival of these Lincolnshire prints did Ralph scrutinize them, paragraph after paragraph and line by line, in the expectation of reading the announcement which he so anxiously longed to behold, but nothing more was yet said upon the subject. At last, about three weeks after the occurrence, a paragraph of three or four lines appeared, merely adverting to the theft of the child, and expressing the editorial regret " that nothing had as yet transpired to clear up the uncertainty into which the calamity had plunged the noble family." It concluded by stating that " his lordship remained at the castle, but that her ladyship was gone, it was believed, on a visit to some relations, for change of air,

and to recruit herself after the dreadful shock she had received." Ralph Farefield was both astonished and annoyed that the body was not discovered; and seeking out Chiffin, he questioned him very closely all over again relative to the whole affair. The Cannibal at first swore furiously at being suspected; but when reduced to calmness by means of gold, he vowed and protested that the version he had originally given Ralph Farefield was the correct one.

"The Lincolnshire papers proved that the child was stolen," he added, "and that it was me who carried him off has been sufficiently shown to you by the production of the clothes, and by the mention of the mark on the little thing's shoulder. There are plenty of ways to account for why no fuss was made about the discovery of the body. The people of the cottage at whose door I left it might have been frightened, and buried it secretly; or it might even have been put underground in the usual manner, no one suspecting that it could possibly be Lord Saxondale's lost child, because the few clothes I left on it might have had no name or marks to show who the infant was. Or a resurrection-man may have picked it up, and taken it to a doctor's. There's plenty of ways to account for why no noise was made about the corpse. At all events, it was by your instructions that the body was left exposed in some public place, and I am not answerable if the thing has failed."

Ralph was compelled to be satisfied by this reasoning, which, indeed, was feasible enough. That the child had actually been made away with, he entertained no doubt; and though he could have wished that the discovery of the body should have established the fact, yet he argued that when his uncle died the title and estates must of necessity devolve to him who, in default of the appearance of any other claimant, should come forward and assert his own rights. Altogether unaware of Lady Saxondale's secret presence in London, he neither foresaw nor apprehended anything that could possibly arise to defeat his plans. Thus did a month elapse from the date of the child's disappearance; and now, as Ralph was one morning examining the newly arrived Lincolnshire papers, he was struck by observing a paragraph to the effect that "the venerable Lord Saxondale was lying in a most dangerous condition at the castle, and not expected to survive many days."

Overjoyed at this announcement, Ralph Farefield lost not a moment in ordering a post-chaise and proceeding into Lincolnshire. What could be more legitimate than that he, the heir presumptive, if not, indeed, the heir apparent, should thus hurry off to his uncle's death-bed on reading the news of his extreme danger in a public print? As he was whirled along in the post-chaise, he gave free rein to the diabolical joy of his reflections. Was he not now touching upon the goal of success? Was he not about to reap the rich fruit of his plans? What though this triumphant success were gained by crime, he cared not. Perish all contrition, all remorse, now that the acme of his hopes was about to be reached. Within a few hours, perhaps, he should hear himself saluted by the swelling titles of " my lord " and " lordship." Within a few hours, also, he would stand at a window whence the whole domain that stretched around would be his own. Peradventure his uncle was already no more, and he therefore Lord Saxondale and owner of the broad domain at that very moment? Such were his reflections. There was a maddening joy in them, an intoxication of bliss, a frenzy, a delirium. On sped the chaise, hours had passed, it was already entering the well-known territory of Lincolnshire. Ralph bade the postilions speed as if for their lives. Now the horses were changed for the last time, only eight miles from Saxondale. In three-quarters of an hour he would be there. The blood seemed to gush like fire in his veins, but not with pain; it was with ecstasy, with the most fevered, throbbing, thrilling, burning delight.

And now the towers and battlemented buildings of Saxondale broke upon his view as the sun was descending to its western home, and Ralph literally bounded upon his seat inside the chaise. His impatience amounted to a wild fever-heat which water could not slake and wine would madden. On sped the chaise, and now he was suddenly struck with the necessity of assuming a calm demeanour. This he did, but it was an hypocrisy difficult to assume on the part of one who in his own base mind felt that he had so many reasons for enthusiastic joy. The post-chaise dashed up to the front entrance of the castle. Ralph immediately looked out of the window as one of the folding-doors slowly opened, and the instant his eye caught the countenance of the porter, he read the truth at once. Lord Saxondale was dead.

The servants came forth to receive their late master's nephew, but it was with no hurried step or welcoming looks. They walked with measured tread and wore a grave demeanour, as men do where death has just asserted his omnipotence. Nor did they exactly know in what manner to receive or address Ralph Farefield. Little skilled in the law, they were unable to decide whether he was now Lord Saxondale or not, inasmuch as though the infant heir was missing, there had been no positive proofs of the babe's death. As for what Lady Saxondale had done, or might be still doing in London or elsewhere, and as to any discoveries, more or less important, which she might have made, they were utterly ignorant on all these points, having been kept in the dark respecting her ladyship's proceedings.

Descending from the post-chaise, Ralph put a question to the servants, but in a manner which showed that he already anticipated the answer; and that answer was precisely the one he had alike expected and hoped. Lord Saxondale was indeed no more, but barely an hour had elapsed since the venerable peer breathed his last. Ralph, assuming as mournful a demeanour as he could possibly put on, desired one of the servants to conduct him to the apartment of the deceased, and this command was immediately obeyed. In a few minutes Ralph stood in the chamber of death, and by the couch in which his uncle had so recently expired. The Reverend Mr. Clifton and the surgeon withdrew, from motives of respect; for whether the heir or not, at all events Ralph was too near a relative not to be treated courteously. Besides, it occurred to the worthy clergyman that the nephew might be stricken with remorse for his past conduct, and that he did not choose to have spectators of the feelings to which he might give vent. Alas! how little did the unsophisticated and well-meaning Mr. Clifton know of the true nature of the emotions that were now agitating within the breast of that bad man!

The nurse did, however, remain in the room. It was her privilege, a mournful one, but not the less sanctioned by custom, to remain with the dead; and Ralph, mindful of her presence, still retained that hypocritical air of sadness which he had put on for the occasion. He gazed upon the countenance of the deceased, and not for a single instant did his heart smite him at the thought that he himself in

reality was the cause of his uncle's death. But while looking down upon that countenance which was now peaked, thin, sunken, and wan beneath the finger of the destroyer, his mind was wandering with the speed of a race-horse throughout the sumptuous apartments of the castle, and over the broad domain of Saxondale, all of which he looked upon as his own.

So engrossed was he in these thoughts, even while seeming to contemplate with sadness the face of the dead, that he did not hear the trampling of horses and the rapid rush of wheels, which sounds, however, did reach the chamber. Treading noiselessly over the thick carpet, the nurse, who had caught those sounds, approached the window, and slightly lifting the white blind, which was drawn completely down, she glanced forth. It was still daylight, and the nurse could see plainly enough all objects without. Quickly turning away from the window again, she whispered to Ralph, "It is her ladyship's travelling-carriage. Poor thing! I suppose she has come back."

"Ah!" ejaculated Ralph, startled from his reverie by this announcement; and then an expression of malignant triumph appeared upon his features as he thought to himself that the moment was now at hand when he should be enabled to exhibit his hatred toward the being whom he had included amongst the number of those that had been such obstacles in his path.

"Hush!" said the old nurse, placing her finger upon her lip to remind him that so loud an ejaculation was but little suited to the solemnity of the chamber of death; and at the same time she gazed upon him with a half-frightened, half-reproachful look, on account of that malignant expression which had swept over his features.

But Ralph, taking little heed of the old woman, advanced to the window, and raising the blind, he looked out. The travelling-carriage was however drawn so close up to the entrance that he could not from that point obtain a view of those who alighted. So he turned away again, and once more approaching the bed, waited till Lady Saxondale should make her appearance, for he naturally conjectured that she would at once repair to the chamber of death.

Nor was he mistaken. In a few minutes the door opened slowly, and her ladyship entered. She had thrown off her

bonnet and shawl, and appeared in a simple morning wrapper in which she had travelled; for she also had left London that morning in the utmost haste, the instant she read in the Lincolnshire paper, which had happened to reach her, the announcement respecting her husband's danger.

And now Lady Saxondale and Ralph met face to face. That same expression of malignity which a few minutes before had appeared upon his features rose up again; but instead of cowering or quailing beneath it, the dark eyes of Lady Saxondale flashed upon him a look of mingled defiance and contempt. The next moment she was upon her knees by the side of the couch of death, and her head was bowed down upon the cold hand of her departed husband. In this position she remained for several minutes, and a solemn silence prevailed in the room, a silence which not even Ralph dared interrupt. It was not any violent paroxysm of grief in which the lady testified her sorrow for her loss; hers was a mind that retained its woe inwardly. But that she did feel, and deeply feel, the death of the old man who had been so kind and good and affectionate toward her, there can be no doubt. Besides, when she slowly rose again from her kneeling posture, there were tears upon the cold marble hand of the deceased, tears which she had shed silently.

She stood for several minutes more gazing down upon the lifeless features of the old lord, and her own countenance was fixed and rigid, but with that deep and even awful calm which indicated that there was a powerful agitation of feelings within. Then she stooped down and imprinted a kiss upon the forehead of the dead; and as she slowly turned away, her looks once more encountered those of Ralph, whose presence for the last few minutes she seemed altogether to have forgotten.

" Madam," he said, in a low, deep voice, " it must be upwards of five years since last we met. Little then did plain Miss Clifton imagine that when next we met she would be Lady Saxondale, although it was probable enough that I should be what I now am, Lord Saxondale."

" No, sir," she answered, with grave solemnity, " you are still plain Mr. Ralph Farefield."

" How, madam? " he cried, with mingled menace and alarm.

" Because, sir," she responded, " I have recovered my

child, and the infant Lord Saxondale is at the present moment beneath this roof." Then, with so peculiar a look that it struck dismay to Ralph's heart, she turned around and slowly quitted the room.

He immediately followed her, horrible feelings raging in his soul. His thoughts had in a moment been plunged into a frenzied whirl; there seemed to be madness in his brain. Had he been deceived by Chiffin, or was Lady Saxondale deceiving him? Had not the child been made away with, or, if it had, was her ladyship trying to palm off a supposititious one upon the world as her own? But he would soon know. Ah, perhaps she did not think that he was aware of that mark upon the shoulder, the presence of which could alone prove the identity, and the absence of which would at once stamp the fraud.

He overtook her as she was proceeding to the nearest drawing-room.

" Your ladyship says that the child is found? " he muttered, between his set teeth; and though he endeavoured to master his emotions and appear collected and cool, yet he could not.

" I said so, and it is the truth," replied Lady Saxondale, calmly and gravely, as she had previously addressed him in the death-chamber.

" We shall see," he said, and the words came hissing from his lips as if from those of a serpent; for his feelings were terrible, — all the more terrible because so concentrated and it was impossible to allow them free vent.

" Sir, do you dare doubt me? " demanded Lady Saxondale, stopping abruptly short and turning upon him the full power of her looks.

He staggered back for a moment, for it struck him that there was something so confident and so full of assurance on her part that it was impossible she could be practising a deception; and his countenance became ghastly, while a sickening sense of utter desolation and wretchedness seized upon his soul. Lady Saxondale 's eyes lingered upon him but for a moment, and then she pursued her way toward the drawing-room. Again mastering his emotions, and clutching at the hope that hers was the attempt of a desperate woman to carry a tremendous deceit with a high hand, he followed her into the apartment.

And there, sure enough, was a child in the arms of Mabel, and worthy Mr. Clifton was bending down and saying all kinds of affectionate and tender things to it, just as if the little innocent were perfectly capable of comprehending these ebullitions of heartfelt feeling on the part of its grandfather. The surgeon was standing by, contemplating the scene with ineffable satisfaction.

Lady Saxondale advanced and took the child in her arms, pressing it to her bosom in a manner that was as much as to imply no earthly power should now snatch it from her. It was only with a superhuman effort that Ralph could still master the feelings which were constituting a perfect hell within his breast, but it was still with a lingering ghastliness on the countenance and with pale, quivering lips that he approached the group.

" This, then," he said, "is my little cousin, the lost child? "

" God in his mercy be thanked for the dear babe's restoration! " exclaimed the Reverend Mr. Clifton, in a fervid tone. " Poor little innocent! He is somewhat thinner and paler than when last I saw him, but I should have known him, for all that, amongst a thousand, — ay, and a thousand miles off, too," added the worthy gentleman. " There are the same pretty eyes, and the very dimple on the chin likewise lingers, though the sweet face has lost somewhat of his chubbiness. Poor little thing! Doubtless it has not been so well cared for as when beneath this roof. But we will take care that the darling shall not be torn from us again."

And desisting for a moment from his enthusiastic rhapsodies, the good old gentleman bent his eyes upon Ralph, as much as to say that he was at no loss to conjecture whose wickedness it was that had led to the temporary abstraction of the infant.

" Without for a single moment wishing to create any bad feeling," said Ralph, not choosing to notice Mr. Clifton's significant regards, " but as a matter of common justice to myself — and I am sure," he added, suddenly turning toward the surgeon, " this gentleman, as a disinterested person, will acquit me of any impropriety — "

" Oh, I understand you, sir," interrupted Lady Saxondale, with a somewhat haughty air. " You wish to be assured that this is indeed the beloved child that was lost? I might observe that it is only those who are themselves capable

of actions the vilest and the basest that entertain kindred suspicions of others; but in the solemn circumstances which have brought you hither, sir, I will raise no subject for indecorous altercation. Nay, I will even admit that it is natural for you to insist upon receiving those proofs to which you have alluded."

" Perhaps, then, your ladyship," said Ralph, " will condescend to explain how you recovered possession of your son; because, well-meaning and honourably intentioned as your ladyship may be, guarantees must be afforded that no deception has been practised toward yourself by any one who may have been instrumental in consigning that child to your care."

" Sir," answered Lady Saxondale, " this interview is for many reasons too painful to be prolonged, and therefore you will pardon me for declining to enter upon any verbal explanations at all. Nature herself has afforded the means of giving you the best proof that can possibly exist. This gentleman," she added, flinging a glance toward the surgeon, " received my son at its birth, and can no doubt testify to its identity with the child I now hold in my arms."

Thus speaking, Lady Saxondale sat down, and retaining the babe upon her lap, she calmly and deliberately proceeded to unfasten its clothing. Ralph watched her with a suspense that was truly awful to endure. He watched her thus, not only with intense anxiety to see whether the mark would actually appear upon the child's shoulder, but also did he watch her to observe whether any trouble was in her own looks, any betrayal on her part of conscious deception. But no, a grave solemnity sat upon her handsome countenance, and not a finger trembled, nor even appeared to hesitate to do its work, as she unfastened the strings of the babe's clothing. This process did not occupy more than half a minute, but in Ralph's estimation it seemed whole hours, and therein were concentrated the agonies, the tortures, and the excruciations of centuries. At length it was done, the garments were pulled down, and the mark of the strawberry appeared upon the child's shoulder.

Ralph felt annihilated. He moved not, he spoke not, he scarcely seemed to breathe; but statue-like he stood transfixed, unutterable thoughts working upon his ghastly countenance. At the same time, the surgeon, with the methodical

precision which is characteristic of his profession, and not with the slightest idea of positively satisfying himself upon the point, — for there was not a doubt upon his mind which required clearing up at all, — bent down and for a few moments scrutinized the mark.

" Yes," he said, lifting his head again, " if I were on my death-bed, I could unhesitatingly swear to it."

" As a matter of course, madam, I have not another word to say," murmured Ralph, with sickness at the heart and dizziness in the brain; and then he stood staring with mingled vacancy and wildness upon the infant, as Lady Saxondale calmly and deliberately proceeded to tie the strings of its clothes again.

When this was done Lady Saxondale gave the child to Mabel, and rising from her seat, she said, " Mr. Farefield, if you wish to attend your late uncle's remains to the tomb, I cannot for a single moment offer any objection."

" Madam! " he ejaculated, starting as if from a dream. Then somewhat recovering himself, he appeared to hesitate for a few moments. " Will you allow me to say one word to your ladyship in private? "

" Not in any other privacy than this," she answered, walking into the recess of the window that was remotest from the group; and as the room was very spacious, the distance was sufficient to place them beyond ear-shot, for Ralph at once followed her to that recess.

" Madam," he said, with the look and voice of an utterly broken and helpless man, " I am well aware that I ought to expect no favour from your ladyship. But still I would venture to beseech that you do not altogether suffer me to go forth penniless upon the wide world. For that my uncle has mentioned my name in his will, I cannot entertain the slightest expectation."

" And I am sure that he has not," answered Lady Saxondale. " But I do not wish to deal too severely with you, Mr. Farefield," she immediately added, " though, Heaven knows, I have suffered enough through your wickedness."

His looks quailed beneath the meaning glance which she bent upon him with the full power of her dark eyes, and he murmuringly said, " I thank you at least for the few cheering words which preceded the latter portion of your speech. Tell me, is my presence within these walls hateful to your

ladyship? If so, give me the means, and I will depart at once. But without them I cannot, for it is a beggar, a veritable beggar, that you see before you."

Lady Saxondale appeared to reflect for some moments, and then she said, with more rapid utterance than she had previously used, " When we were boy and girl, Ralph Farefield, we were companions, and often and often have we played together, as happy, joyous children, in those gardens. I cannot think of all that and not feel some little sympathy on your behalf, — though, God knows, you do not deserve it. But you cannot remain here; you must depart to-morrow, and I have many things to say to you — Do not mistake me; it is merely what I purpose to do for your welfare that I wish to speak to you about. At the same time, I do not choose that others " — and she glanced over her shoulder toward the spot where her father and the surgeon were conversing together close by Mabel and the child — " should think that from any protracted conversation between us I am either led by your entreaties or my own good feeling to do what you so little deserve. Retire, then, for the present, to a room which will be prepared for you, and to-night, at eleven o'clock, meet me in the chapel. You know your way thither, and the doors will be open."

She then bowed with distant coolness, so as to have the appearance of exercising a haughty dignity to put an end to a discourse which should be continued no longer, and she turned to rejoin the group at the other extremity of the room.

Ralph, who had listened with mingled astonishment and reviving hope to the singular speech which Lady Saxondale had thus delivered with rapid utterance, remained rooted to the spot for a few moments, but speedily recovering himself, he hastened from the apartment.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHAPEL

The clock in the tower over the entrance of Saxondale Castle was proclaiming the hour of eleven with its deep, metallic tones as Ralph, having threaded the various passages and corridors leading toward the chapel, entered that place of appointment. The wax candle which he carried in one hand and shaded with the other, to protect the light from the draught, threw but a dismal, sickly gleam around, rather enhancing than dispelling the gloom of the place, while the open arched entrance into the cloister containing the tombs and the statue seemed the mouth of a cavern of pitchy blackness.

Ralph Farefield was not, however, the man to give way to superstitious feelings. The selfish concerns of the known world were too absorbing to allow his imagination to wander to that unknown world whence spirits are conjured up. Placing the candle in a niche, so as to secure it from the draught, he leaned against the wall with folded arms, awaiting Lady Saxondale, who had not yet made her appearance. Her conduct had both surprised and perplexed Ralph Farefield. What could she mean? Why this mysterious appointment? Could she not have managed some other place and hour for a meeting? And did she not actually compromise her reputation by the course she was adopting? Was it possible that she had conceived a passion for him? Naturally good-looking and of a strong constitution, he bore but few traces of the debauched and profligate life which he had led; and being tall, slender, and well-formed, it might not be considered an overweening vanity on his part if he entertained the supposition that a young and impassioned woman had really fallen in love with him.

Besides, he was not more than five and twenty, only four years older than Lady Saxondale herself; and thus, everything considered, he seemed warranted in entertaining that belief. But if it should prove incorrect, then must he suppose her conduct to be instigated by that scintillation of friendly feeling to which she had alluded, and which she described as being conjured up by the recollections of earlier days, when as boy and girl they were playmates together? Or if even this supposition did not account for her behaviour toward him, was it that she had special reasons of her own for wishing to get him away from the castle as soon as possible and that she really had no other opportunity of carrying her views into execution except by means of the earliest and most secret appointment which at the moment she had been able to think of?

While revolving these various speculations in his mind, Ralph Farefield heard a light step approaching along the corridor toward the chapel door, which he had left ajar, and in a few moments Lady Saxondale made her appearance, also with a wax taper in her hand. Ralph at once saw that she was pale, very pale, but her countenance gave no other indication of any feelings which might be agitating in her bosom. Closing the door, but not fastening it, she approached him with slow step, and placing the candle in the same niche where he had deposited his own, she said, " Mr. Farefield, you are doubtless surprised, indeed, you must be, at my conduct. It may appear indecorous, it may even warrant you in entertaining an evil opinion with regard to me. Therefore, let me at once assure you that the motives which prompt me to act with kindness toward you, and the considerations which have compelled me to render our meeting as secret as possible, are precisely and exactly those which I stated this evening when in the drawing-room."

While Lady Saxondale was thus speaking, she assumed a certain dignity of manner which even more than her words convinced Ralph that his supposition of her having fallen in love with him was altogether unfounded. He was therefore compelled to believe himself the object of her sympathy alone, and he accordingly looked as humble, contrite, and submissive as he possibly could.

" But in addition to the motives already explained for making an appointment here," continued Lady Saxondale,

" I had another, which will presently appear. Listen to what I have to say.

" Until the birth of a son and heir, your late uncle experienced considerable uneasiness on my account, knowing that in the ordinary course of nature his death must take place many years before my own. In consequence of the stringent terms of the entail, which, had our marriage produced no heir, would have given the entire property to you, the only means by which your late uncle could make a provision for me was by saving as much ready money as possible, for previous to our marriage his lordship had none put by. With a view, therefore, to economy, we remained altogether at the castle, and did not visit the metropolis during the season. The result of his lordship's savings has been close upon twenty thousand pounds, and this money — But ah!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, suddenly interrupting herself, as if a thought had struck her, " if I tell you where this money is concealed —"

" I understand your ladyship," said Ralph, perceiving that she hesitated. " You generously intend to give me a portion, and you would ask what guarantee there is that I will not by force and violence possess myself of the whole? Madam, think you that while receiving your bounty I am capable of such black villainy? "

" No, I will not entertain so evil an opinion of human nature," rejoined Lady Saxondale. " It is my purpose to give you five thousand pounds of that money, and if you reform your mode of life, depend upon it that I will not be unmindful of you, to the extent of such means as, during the minority of my son, circumstances may place within my reach. But as a condition of what I am now doing for you, I insist upon your departure from the castle; and what I may hereafter do is likewise subject to the condition that you never come near these walls again."

Of course Ralph Farefield readily promised everything that Lady Saxondale required, but his submissiveness, his gratitude, and his contrition — all of which he took pains to exhibit — were but a detestable hypocrisy; for in his own mind he was resolved to take immediate possession of the whole twenty thousand pounds of which her ladyship had spoken and in due time adopt fresh measures for removing the infant heir from his path.

" Now, Mr. Farefield," continued Lady Saxondale, " we are about to proceed together into the vaults beneath this chapel, for there is the treasure concealed in a strong chest. But as I am thus compelled to trust myself in such a place and at such an hour, you will not think it imprudent on my part to have adopted some little precaution. Take one of those candles, and just look forth from the door. You need make no observation from your lips."

Ralph Farefield did as he was desired, and taking the candle, he advanced to the chapel door, opened it, and looked forth into the passage. There he beheld Mabel, her ladyship's confidential tirewoman, standing in the middle of the corridor.

" Leave that door open," said Lady Saxondale.

Ralph obeyed this command likewise, and retraced his steps to the spot where her ladyship was standing.

Taking down her own candle from the niche, she said, " Now come with me. But I would rather you should proceed in front."

" Madam," he answered, " I am sorry that you entertain such a dreadful opinion relative to me."

" Let us not make any unnecessary comments," rejoined Lady Saxondale. " Proceed."

" Shall we not light one of these torches? " he asked, glancing toward a couple which rested in iron rings fastened to the wall, " for I presume we are about to descend into the vaults — "

" No, the candles will do," interrupted Lady Saxondale. " Proceed."

Ralph accordingly led the way into the vestiary, Lady Saxondale following close behind. By her direction he opened the low door communicating with the flight of stone steps leading into the vaults and they descended together.

On the fourth night after the incidents just related, and as the clock was proclaiming the hour of twelve, the inmates of the castle were suddenly alarmed by a cry that burglars had broken in. This cry emanated from Mabel, who was passing from her mistress's chamber to her own, and who observed the figures of three or four men creeping stealthily along the corridor. In a few minutes the entire household was aroused, and the men servants, arming themselves

with such offensive and defensive weapons as came readily to hand, commenced an immediate search over the premises.

In consequence of the vastness of the building and the number of rooms, passages, corridors, and nooks that had to be thus searched, the investigation occupied a good hour; and though there were evident traces of a burglarious entry having been really affected, it seemed equally clear that the thieves had got safe off again, for they could not be discovered.

These burglars were none other than Chiffin the Cannibal and three of his infamous associates. Having seen in a London paper the paragraph relative to the old lord's illness, which had been copied from the Lincolnshire journal, Chiffin had at once called at Ralph Farefield's lodgings; but on arriving there, he learned that Mr. Farefield had gone down the previous day into Lincolnshire. Chiffin, thinking that his services might possibly be required, — or perhaps having the intention of being one of the first to pay his respects to the new Lord Saxondale, — set off with three of his associates into Lincolnshire. But on arriving in the neighbourhood of the castle and making secret inquiries, they learned that Lady Saxondale had recovered her lost child, that the old lord was dead, and that Ralph Farefield had departed suddenly after a stay of only a very few hours. Whatever Chiffin might have thought relative to the restoration of the infant heir of Saxondale to its mother's bosom is of no consequence at present; suffice it to say that finding, as he himself observed, it was "all up" with Ralph Farefield, neither he nor his associates were the men to have come down into Lincolnshire for nothing. They accordingly resolved to pay a visit to the interior of the castle, and self-appropriate whatsoever they could lay their hands upon.

The burglarious entrance was effected, but as the four villains were creeping along one of the passages, the alarm was suddenly given by Mabel, as above described. To retreat by the same way they had entered was now impossible, and hurrying along at random, the burglars reached the western side of the castle. There they paused, listened, and finding that all was still, took a rapid view, by means of a dark lantern, of the place where they had thus halted. A door was standing open a little farther on; they pursued their investigation, and found that it led into the chapel.

From a window in the corridor they saw lights moving quickly about in the other parts of the buildings overlooking the quadrangle; it was therefore evident the household was on the alert. Without further deliberation they sought refuge in the chapel, and found their way to the vestiary, which they at first fancied was a means of egress. Opening the door leading down upon the flight of steps, they were about to prosecute their search for an avenue of escape, when the lantern went out, the candle being all exhausted. They were now involved in the pitchy blackness of that place, but passing in upon the steps, they closed the door, resolving to wait the issue of events. Presently they heard voices in the chapel, which the domestics were searching as well as every other part of the premises. The servants even penetrated into the vestiary, and the burglars resolved, if discovered, to make the most desperate resistance. But the servants, not for a moment fancying that the burglars were likely to have taken refuge in the vaults, and perhaps being anxious to get away from that gloomy place as speedily as possible, contented themselves with merely searching the vestiary, and seeing no one, sped off to pursue their investigations elsewhere.

The burglars suffered a good half-hour to elapse ere they made a move from their place of concealment. They did not dare descend the steps with the chance of plunging into this perilous gulf, so they decided upon issuing from the stone stairs. But when they did emerge forth again, they scarcely knew how to act, being involved as they were in utter darkness. They had the means about them of striking a light, but no candle to light. There consequently seemed no alternative but to grope their way out of the chapel, and trust to chance for effecting a safe issue from the castle. While they were thus guiding themselves by feeling the walls with their hands, Chiffin, who was foremost, suddenly encountered an iron ring in which something was stuck, and by the touch he at once knew it to be a torch. Lighting a match, he discovered that it was so, and close by, in a second ring, was another torch. These torches, we should observe, were always kept in the chapel for use when visitors were shown over that part of the building when it was dusk or dark, the glare of torches giving a far more powerful light than mere lamps or candles for the inspection of the tombs and monuments.

The discovery of these torches was hailed with joy by the burglars; and after a few moments' deliberation they determined upon seeking for the means of issue by that flight of steps where they had remained concealed, but down which they had not dared to venture in the pitchy darkness. Taking the two torches with them into the vestiary, they lighted them there, and descended the circular flight of stone stairs. This descent was very deep, but at length it seemed to terminate in some cavern, and now the glare of the torches was reflected upon the surface of water. The vaults were flooded from the leakings of the Trent which rolled above them.

But ah! why springs that ejaculation of astonishment from the lips of Chiffin? It is because the glare of the torches has suddenly revealed to his eyes the face of a corpse floating upon the water. And that first ejaculation is immediately followed by a second, as he recognizes the countenance of Ralph Farefield.

The burglars stood gazing in silent wonder upon the dead body, until it sluggishly floated to the very foot of the steps, and then Chiffin, stooping down, stretched forth his hand, and, grasping the collar of the drowned man's coat, drew the corpse up the steps. It was but little changed, and did not seem as if it had been in the water more than three or four days. But it was not with any hope of restoring life, nor with the least intention of giving any alarm relative to this discovery, that the burglars dragged forth the dead body from the flood. It was for the simple purpose of rifling its pockets of whatsoever they might contain. Having done this, and possessing themselves of the little jewelry and slender stock of money which Ralph had about him at the time when he met his death, Chiffin and his associates left the corpse lying upon the steps, and finding that there was no avenue of escape in that direction, they retraced their way up into the chapel. Here they were compelled to extinguish their torches, lest the glare shining through the windows might attract attention; but as the castle was now once more quiet, they experienced little difficulty in accomplishing a safe retreat from the premises.

CHAPTER V

THE OPERA BOX

NINETEEN years had elapsed since the occurrences at Saxondale Castle, — nineteen pinions shed from the wing of Time and abandoned to the past, while he sweeps onward through the infinite mazes of Eternity! Yes, nineteen years had merged into the cumulating mass of centuries that are of bygone date, and this leap which our story accomplishes brings us to the middle of 1844.

It was on a Saturday night, in the month of June, in the year just named, that the opera was more than usually crowded. Thither had flocked the fair, the noble, the rich, and the high-born, and to all outward appearance happiness was in every heart. The whole sweeping range of first-tier boxes was resplendent with diamonds, sparkling above lofty brows, upon glossy hair, around snowy necks, pendent to delicate ears, or circling arms as white as snow-flakes as they reclined gracefully on the crimson-cushioned parapet. Bright as those gems, too, shone beauty's eyes, white as the pearls that blended their chaster attractions with those of the glittering gems were the teeth which were revealed in smiles between the parting roses of the lips.

In respect to the male companions of those fair ones, we may observe that elegance and taste and highest fashion characterized their apparel; spotless were the gloves, snowy the white waistcoats and gorgeous the figured ones, unexceptionable the tie of the cravats, and brilliant the mirrored surface of the varnished boots, whose material was scarcely even of brown-paper thickness.

The scene was resplendent beyond description, — appearing to be a reflex of fairy-land with the combined glories of diamonds, pearls, splendid apparel, woman's charms, and

the superb decorations of the theatre, and the flood of dazzling lustre pouring upon all. From the stage rolled the full tide of song, with the splendid majesty of Lablache, Rossini, and Grisi. Smiles were on every countenance, rapture danced in beaming eyes, and then plaudits escaped from every lip, the well-bred listlessness of aristocracy and fashion yielding to the electric impulse which thrilled around and giving vent to a burst of momentary enthusiasm.

But of the first-tier boxes there was one whose charming occupants must specially demand our notice. The group, at this particular instant when we thus seek to rivet the reader's attention upon that box, consisted of four young ladies, and vainly amidst the brilliant galaxy of beauty filling the whole theatre, might the eye seek for brighter stars of loveliness than those. They were all four apparelled in the richest manner, — all of fine figure, elegant bearing, and surpassing beauty. On the crimson-cushioned parapet of the box were opera-glasses and bouquets, the latter diffusing a soft and refreshing fragrance through the otherwise heated and heavy atmosphere.

Beautiful as the four young ladies were, yet the loveliness of one outshone that of her three companions. Arrayed in a dress of white brocaded satin, fitting tight to the bust, but the skirt of which flowed down in heavy waves of silver, she had all the advantage of magnificent apparel to enhance the surprising lustre of her charms. But even had she been attired in the simplest costume, hers was a loveliness alike too splendid and too fascinating not to attract general notice. Tall, even to the full height of the proudest womanhood, she blended the stateliness of this imposing stature with the softer traits of delicate, interesting, and enchanting beauty. Her shape, though perfectly symmetrical, was characterized by gorgeous developments, but the gracefully voluptuous contours were replete with the virgin freshness of youth. Though of the most striking appearance, there seemed to be a halo of innocence and a perfume of chastity about her calculated to win the heart even more than her splendid loveliness excited the passions. Her hair was of dark auburn, arranged in bands, — a wreath of artificial leaves, gemmed with sparkling diamonds, setting off the Grecian knot at the back of the well-shaped head. Her arms, bare to the shoulders, were ornamented with bracelets that

delineated the roundness of their exquisite modelling, and their dazzling whiteness, as well as that of her splendid bust, outshone even her snowy drapery. One delicately gloved hand held an embroidered kerchief; the fingers of the other negligently retained the fan, which was more for ornament than for use, as there was nothing artificial, nothing coquettish about this resplendent creature.

Her nose was perfectly straight, her countenance classically faultless, with the pure Phidian outline that marks high birth, delineating the short upper lip, the delicately rounded chin, and the high forehead. Her eyes had those almond-shaped orbits which so seldom belong to English beauty, but which are deemed the excelling charm of Italian loveliness, and the pupils, of the deepest, clearest blue, seemed to swim in a field of bluish lustre like that of the finest mother-of-pearl. When her lips parted slightly, in the hushed rapture with which she listened to the glorious tide of song rolling through the house, the teeth of whitest ivory were visible between the vermilion lines of that sweet mouth. Her companion has already been described as dazzlingly fair, but upon the cheeks the white of the lily deepened by degrees into a soft and pure carnation, which no art could imitate, but which seemed too beautiful to be real. Natural however, it was, and forming not the least bewitching trait of that exceeding beauty which combined so much delicacy and sweetness with such magnificence and grandeur.

Such was Lady Florina Staunton, at that delicious age of nineteen, when, having burst into the glories of a somewhat early womanhood, so far as related to the rich developments of her form, she unconsciously, as it were, breathed and looked the innocent voluptuousness of nature in full blow, and as the looks of the observer wandered from charm to charm and from beauty to beauty, it would seem as if there were no resting-place for the eye while thus gliding from grace to grace in endless succession. It dared not settle upon the brow, for that was too dazzling; nor upon the eyes, for the heart would be left in their depths; nor upon the lips, for they were too inviting; nor upon the bosom, for that was too pure. In a word, it was impossible for the most indifferent observer, even the veriest anchorite, to contemplate without emotion that enchanting creature in

whom sweetness combined with splendour, brilliancy with softness, and magnificence with chastity.

She was unmarried, but engaged to be united to a young nobleman of about her own age, yet little fitted in other respects to be the accepted suitor of so divine a being. This nobleman was Edmund, Lord Saxondale, whom we shall very shortly describe.

Although Lady Florina Staunton and her three young friends were seated alone in the box, at the moment when we thus introduce them to our readers, yet they had not arrived at the opera unattended by male companions. Lord Harold Staunton, Florina's brother, and Lord Saxondale, her suitor, had been their escort; but these two young noblemen had stepped out for a few minutes, with the pretext of saying a word to some acquaintances in another box, but really for the purpose of going behind the scenes and bestowing their flippant impertinences upon any of the ballet-girls who might choose to listen to them. Lord Harold Staunton was a fine, tall, handsome young man of three and twenty, but was a confirmed rake and accomplished *roué*. He and his sister were orphans, the young lady residing with an aunt, but Lord Harold occupied lodgings in Jermyn Street. He and Lord Saxondale were upon the most intimate terms, and were inseparably together. Not that this bond of union was really cemented by the sacred feeling of friendship, neither of them possessing a heart capable of such a pure and elevated sentiment. And yet the tie that held them together was, at least for the present, binding enough. It was that intimacy which, so often prevailing amongst dissipated young men in high life, rendered them mutually necessary and useful. For, on the one hand, Lord Harold was poor, and, indeed, totally dependent on the bounty of his relatives; therefore it was very convenient for him to be enabled to make use of Lord Saxondale's purse, which was well filled by the handsome allowance he enjoyed during his minority. On the other hand, Lord Saxondale was proud of the friendship of such a fine, dashing, high-spirited fellow as Lord Harold Staunton, who was, moreover, a general favourite with the ladies, was acquainted with everybody "worth knowing" about town, and possessed a most familiar knowledge of all the places of amusement, high or low, that are resorted to by profligate fashionables and dissolute aristocrats.

And now a few words more relative to Edmund, the bearer of the proud title of Saxondale, ere we proceed continuously with our narrative. He was a couple of months past nineteen years of age, short in stature, thin, and slightly made, not exactly ugly, but very far from good-looking, with hair of that suspicious kind of yellowish brown that in certain lights looks reddish, and with eyes which only by a complimentary fiction could be pronounced blue, but might more properly be described as greenish gray. He had good teeth, which were a considerable saving clause in his features; and his countenance, utterly devoid of the aquiline outline which so proudly characterized his mother's face, had something mean and ignoble not merely in its configuration, but also in its expression. His voice, naturally weak and inharmonious, was rendered still more unpleasant by an affectation of those cracked tones which are assumed by the abominable coxcombs of these days. It did not require a very searching look to read his character; a glance would fathom it. Frivolous-minded, addicted to vicious pleasures and dissipated pursuits, selfish, and utterly incapable of generous actions, vain, conceited, and insufferably impudent withal, ignorant, prejudiced, and believing that because he was a nobleman he must necessarily be a demigod towering above the common mass of humanity, spiteful, malignant, and vindictive, so as to be a cowardly tyrant to his inferiors, and an object of terror or dislike with all those to whom he dared manifest his miserable despotism, quarrelsome as a brother, disobedient as a son, and capricious toward everybody, the youthful possessor of the haughty name of Saxondale was as detestable a character as ever filled amidst the human species that same kind of place which reptiles occupy in the brute creation.

As a matter of course, Edmund had gone through all the various degrees and grades of training which constitute an English nobleman's education. At home, either at Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire or at the town mansion in Park Lane, he had from his earliest years been taught his consequence in being " my lorded " by thick-headed tenant-farmers or obsequious domestics. He had passed through Eton with a tutor at his elbow to do his exercises for him, and save him from the kickings and cuffings to which his peevishness and malignity daily and hourly exposed him

at the hands of other boys. Then he had spent a year at Cambridge, where he was tufted and toadied, and took degrees in debauchery instead of the classics; and then he drove for a few months over France and Germany in a travelling-chariot, emblazoned on the panels to show his rank, and with his tutor to speak for him in the language which he himself but dimly comprehended.

Having returned to England after this trip, he was immediately caught up by Lord Harold Staunton, who had just sent the last human pigeon he had plucked to the Queen's Bench, and who therefore considered the rich young Saxondale a perfect godsend at that particular moment. And in this way had Lord Saxondale been qualified and was still qualifying to fill the post of an hereditary legislator, when in a year and ten months' time the day of his majority would arrive. What advantage the councils of the nation were likely to derive from the assistance of such an individual, when he should take his seat there, we must leave our readers to determine. But very certain it was that young Lord Saxondale was, as far as intellectual accomplishments went, an average sample of his class. Being ignorant of the laws of God and nature and humanity, it was not likely he should be better acquainted with those of his country. He had learned to write, it is true, but his hand was scarcely intelligible, and this, by the bye, is a proof of high breeding, because in fashionable life a good hand is clerkish, and it is " uncommonly vulgar " to be able to express oneself legibly upon paper. Then as to arithmetic, he knew nothing. Who ever heard of a lord condescending to keep his own accounts? He spoke the English language correctly, because this was a mere parrot-like qualification which he could not well help attaining, but as for any other modern languages, he only had the merest smattering of French and the vaguest idea of German, the dead languages being considered the most useful at Eton and Cambridge. As for history, he only knew two things: one was that the Saxondales had taken their origin in the time of the Tudors, and the other that the English had beaten the French at Waterloo; and therefore he was proud of being both a Saxondale and an Englishman.

Having thus sketched, as far as it is at present necessary, the character of Lord Saxondale, and having likewise previously glanced at that of Lord Harold Staunton, we may

resume the thread of our narrative. To proceed, then, we must state that after an absence of three-quarters of an hour from the box where Lady Florina and her three young friends were seated, the two noblemen returned thither, their countenances somewhat flushed and their breath having a vinous odour, for they had been drinking champagne (which young Saxondale had paid for) behind the scenes. A close observer might have noticed that it was with something very much like a look of aversion and a sort of inward shrinking, as if of downright loathing and disgust, that the beauteous Florina met the half-insolent, half-familiar gaze of her accepted suitor when he thus reëntered the box in company with her brother. But his own egregious vanity would not permit him rightly to interpret this transient evidence of emotion on her part, even if he had perceived it; for he actually imagined that the beauteous girl was over head and ears in love with him.

" Well, Flo, did you miss us? " asked her brother, Lord Harold. " Did you think we were lost? "

" To be sure! Your sister was dying with impatience till we came back," interjected Edmund, before the young lady had time to make any answer. " Now, tell me the truth, Florina," he said, bending down over the back of the chair, " weren't you watching the door in anxious expectation that it would open every minute? "

" I certainly thought that your lordship and Harold left us rather too long by ourselves," answered Florina, in a soft, flutelike voice. " But while you were absent, Grisi has given us some splendid outpourings of melody, and — "

But she stopped short, for she was about to add that having been so much engrossed with the music and the singing, she had not particularly missed either her brother or her intended husband.

Lord Saxondale turned to address a few observations to the other three young ladies, and Harold, bending down till his lips nearly touched his sister's ear, whispered hurriedly and angrily, " You should not treat Saxondale with such coldness. Hitherto his vanity has prevented him from seeing it, but he must observe it in time if it continues; and then — "

" And then — what? " asked Florina, turning partially around and fixing her eyes steadily upon her brother's countenance.

" And then he might break off the match," replied Harold. " Not but that he is madly in love with you — "

" If my happiness were consulted, Harold, in this matter," rejoined Florina, the tones of her voice now flowing in that clouded contralto which is so expressive of a deep pathos, "the sooner the engagement were broken off the better."

" Pooh, nonsense, Flo! " returned Lord Harold, angrily. " You know it will be a brilliant thing for you — "

" At all events, we will not discuss the question again, nor here," interrupted Lady Florina, as tears started forth upon the long dark lashes of her superb blue eyes, but she instantaneously wiped them away.

" Now, in a few minutes," said Lord Saxondale, turning again toward his intended, " we shall have the fair débutante. I just now learned that the reports which have appeared in the newspapers are not a bit exaggerated, and this is a wonder, for the journals do lie so confoundedly. But I am told that in the present case there was really no scope for lying in respect to the beauty of this Signora Vivaldi who is to appear for the first time to-night."

" Did you receive that intelligence from the friends in a neighbouring box to whom you and Harold went to speak a few words? " and as Lady Florina put this question, there was a gleam of contempt in her looks and a tinge of sarcasm in her accents, as if she guessed full well whither the two young noblemen had really been; but the next moment resuming her wonted serene yet somewhat pensive sweetness of look, as if she felt it was actually beneath her even to appear to notice the circumstance in the most distant manner, she observed, " How crowded the house is! It is always well filled, but to-night — "

" Perfectly insufferable," remarked Lord Saxondale. " There will be a fine crush on going out presently, and that will be rare and amusing."

" Indeed, with your lordship's permission," said Florina, quietly, " we will wait till the crush is over ere we take our departure."

" Just as you like, Flo," responded Edmund, with a display of familiarity so flippant as to border upon impudence even on the part of an accepted suitor.

" Yes, I shall prefer it," said the young lady, the carnation deepening upon her cheeks.

" The house is indeed famously crowded," resumed her intended. " Won't she have a brilliant reception! " he exclaimed, in allusion to Signora Vivaldi, the new *danseuse* who was to make her first appearance there that evening. " My sisters will be mad to think they didn't come."

" And why are they not here to-night? " asked Florina. " It was remiss on my part not to inquire before."

" Oh, that's explained in a very few words," responded Edmund. " In the first place, you must know that my lady mother abominates operas and all that kind of thing, and as she and I had a little tiff this morning, she was less in a humour than ever to come here to-night. Then Juliana was unwell, and so Constance stayed at home to keep them both company."

" I am sorry to hear that you had any words with Lady Saxondale," remarked Florina, in a serious and even reproachful tone.

" Why, it was all her fault," answered the young nobleman. " She will persist in treating me like a child, and I don't choose to stand it. So whenever she gives herself airs, I always let her know I am not tied to her apron-strings. In fact, I told her pretty plainly this morning that she must not take upon herself to lecture me any more, as I am resolved not to put up with it. But what made her particularly savage, was because I had occasion to remind her that the rank and the wealth were all on the male side of the family, and that she herself was originally nothing more than a poor country parson's daughter."

" You do not mean me to believe that you really spoke thus to your mother? " said Florina, looking up at her intended with mingled surprise and sorrow; for perhaps the poor girl thought that he who would treat a parent in such a manner was not likely to be overparticular how coarsely and cruelly he behaved toward a wife.

" Indeed but I did though," replied Edmund, with a malignant chuckle, as if it were something to congratulate himself upon, " and because old Mabel interfered, I threatened to bundle her, neck and crop, out of the house. But, ah, whom do I see down there in the pit? " and as he thus spoke, he thrust his quizzing-glass into the socket of his eye, screwing up his face so as to retain it there without the necessity of holding it with his hand.

Florina mechanically glanced in the direction toward which Edmund's looks were bent, and as she at once recognized the individual who had attracted his notice, the colour deepened to a richer hue upon her cheeks. At the same instant she dropped her fan, which she hastily stooped to pick up; and a very close observer, had there been one near, might have fancied that it was in the confusion of suddenly excited feelings she thus dropped the fan, or else did it purposely, as a pretext for hiding her emotions.

" Well, I never knew that the steady and hard-working Mr. William Deveril was a frequenter of operas," continued Lord Saxondale. " Upon my word, teaching drawing and music must be very profitable things nowadays, when they enable their professors to appear in handsome costume at Her Majesty's Theatre. By the bye, Deveril has given you drawing-lessons, has he not? "

" He has," answered Florina, who, having taken her bouquet from the parapet of the box, was now bending over it, apparently in deep contemplation of the flowers that composed the nosegay; but suddenly raising her head, she observed, " Since that new style of painting on ivory with fast colours was introduced from Italy a year or two ago, a great many young ladies have gone to school again so far as that beautiful art is concerned, and I have been among the number. That is to say, I have taken a few lessons from Mr. Deveril, and I believe your sisters are doing the same at the present time? "

" That's how I came to know the fellow," remarked Saxondale, contemptuously. " But, by Jove! only look at his impudence. He has actually bowed to us."

The young aristocratic coxcomb turned around disdainfully, not choosing to notice the respectful salutation of a drawing-master; but Mr. Deveril was more than recompensed for the insolent youth's conduct by the graceful acknowledgment of his bow which he received from Lady Florina Staunton.

" You don't mean to say that you noticed him? " exclaimed Saxondale.

" Why, would you have me guilty of a most wanton and unnecessary piece of rudeness? " she asked, but again bending her head over the bouquet of flowers, and, indeed, unconsciously pulling one of them to pieces.

" Well, I think that you are a great deal too condescending," remarked her suitor.

Florina made no reply, and Lord Saxondale, almost immediately forgetting the incident, began talking on some other subject.

The Mr. William Deveril, whose name has just been introduced into our pages, was quite a young man, very handsome, with a complexion that was either naturally dark, or else rendered so by a long residence in a southern clime; for he had been much in Italy, whence he had brought with him to England that art which he now appeared to be teaching with very considerable success, and which, indeed, had quite become the rage amongst ladies in high life, especially as Queen Victoria herself was known to have expressed her approval of it and to have purchased some specimens of Mr. Deveril. We may add, in regard to his personal appearance, that he was tall and symmetrically formed, and looked far more like a nobleman, or what a nobleman ought to be, than the insolent lordling who had just now treated him with such insulting disdain.

Lord Harold Staunton was chatting glibly away with his sister's three young friends, and Lord Saxondale was passing his remarks upon the most prominent occupants, male or female, of the first-tier boxes, with his quizzing-glass in his eye, when the box-keeper entered, and presenting a card to Harold, said, " My lord, the gentleman who gave me this requests permission to pay his respects to your lordship and to Lady Florina Staunton. He desired me to add that he is the bearer of letters from the Marquis of Eagledean in Italy."

" Mr. Gunthorpe," observed Harold, reading the name upon the card. " We don't want to be bothered with visitors now — "

" Oh, but if this Mr. Gunthorpe be the bearer of letters from our uncle," Florina at once remarked, " it is our duty to see him; and, moreover, it should be a pleasure on our part to show him any attention."

" Well, just as you like," returned Harold, and he then bade the box-keeper introduce the gentleman.

" Gunthorpe? Not a very aristocratic name," said Lord Saxondale, the moment the box-keeper had retired. " I don't wonder, Flo, at your brother not wanting to see him

to-night. I'll be bound to say he's some queer-looking old fellow, for an eccentric person, as your uncle the marquis is reported to be, must need have eccentric acquaintances. I can picture to myself an elderly gentleman, either bald or else with an antiquated wig, brown, most likely — "

At this moment the door of the box was again opened, and Mr. Gunthorpe was introduced. Now, be it well understood that the veriest fool in the universe, when indulging in random prophecies and conjectures, must once in a way find his speculation borne out by facts, and so it was in the present instance. For of all comical figures, it would be difficult to conceive one more calculated to excite the ridicule of brainless or thoughtless young men than Mr. Gunthorpe. His age seemed to border upon sixty; he was short, stout, and wore one of the most remarkable brown scratch wigs that ever were seen. He had a red face, and a large double chin overhanging his white cravat. His apparel was equally old-fashioned so far as the cut of the garments was concerned, though he appeared in a full evening suit of black, with white waistcoat; but the square tails of the coat, having pockets with overhanging flaps, the waistcoat reaching far down upon his stomach, the knee-breeches and the black silk stockings, all rendered the costume singular enough. There was an admixture of sharpness and good nature in his countenance, but a physiognomist would have noticed that the former expression could rise into sternness, while the latter could expand into the widest benevolence. On making his appearance he bowed with an offhand sort of politeness, and threw a rapid but searching glance over the assembled group, his eyes, however, dwelling longer on Harold and Florina than on the rest. Lord Saxondale turned around to conceal his laughter, muttering almost audibly as he did so, " What a figure of fun for the opera! "

Lord Harold merely bowed with a well-bred courtesy, but Lady Florina, rising from her chair, advanced a step or two, and said, with a most affable sweetness, " Will you not sit down, Mr. Gunthorpe? "

" No, I thank your ladyship," he answered, " I am off again in a moment. The fact is, I have been in Italy some time, and having had the honour of the Marquis of Eagledean's acquaintance, I may say friendship, he gave me letters of introduction to his relatives in England; and

where I was just now seated in the pit, I observed somebody near me pointing out to another which was Lord Harold Staunton's box. So, happening to have the letters about me, I thought I would step around and present them."

"Any friend of our uncle," said Florina, "is most welcome."

"To be sure, most welcome," echoed Lord Harold, but not seeming as if he thought so. Indeed, from the very instant that he beheld Mr. Gunthorpe, he had conceived a prejudice against him.

"Here are the letters," said the old gentleman, producing a couple, and presenting one to Lord Harold and one to Lady Florina. "And here is one," he added, drawing forth a third from his immense pocketbook, which was literally plethoric with papers, "that I suppose I had better entrust to your ladyship, as it is for your aunt, Lady Macdonald."

"I will take care and give it to my aunt the moment I return home," said Florina, in the same courteous and affable manner as before.

"Where are you staying, Mr. Gunthorpe?" asked Harold. "For I will do myself the pleasure of calling upon you."

"I have put up at the Bell and Crown, Holborn," replied Mr. Gunthorpe.

Lord Harold Staunton became suddenly aghast, and Lord Saxondale laughed outright. Nothing could be more terrible to the exquisite aristocratic refinement of Lord Harold than being compelled to know a man who "put up," as he called it, at such a vulgar out-of-the-way place as the Bell and Crown, Holborn. Harold felt positively little; it seemed to him as if the whole house had heard that ominous announcement of the Bell and Crown, Holborn, and the mischievous pleasure which young Saxondale evidently derived from the circumstance only increased Lord Harold's vexation and confusion.

"Where did you say, my dear sir?" asked Saxondale, with an impudent leer. "For I don't think her ladyship," alluding to Florina, "understood you."

"Indeed, but I did, perfectly well," said the amiable young lady, endeavouring to make up by an increased affability for the rudeness with which the old gentleman was being treated, "and I shall not forget the address, so as not only to remind my brother that he is to call upon

you, Mr. Gunthorpe, but also that my aunt, Lady Macdonald, may write and ask you to come and dine with us."

"But where is Holborn?" asked Lord Saxondale. "At the West End here, we know nothing of those regions."

"I thank your ladyship for your kindness," said Mr. Gunthorpe, not taking the slightest notice of the impertinent young aristocrat, nor yet appearing the least abashed by the supercilious treatment he received. "I shall be delighted to form the acquaintance of Lady Macdonald." Then, turning toward Harold, he said, "When your lordship honours me with a call, perhaps it will be before twelve, as I have a great deal of business in the City, and shall be engaged there every day from noon till five."

"Before twelve?" echoed Lord Harold Staunton, again rendered quite aghast. "Mr. Gunthorpe, you must pardon me, but I — I — am not up, usually speaking, at that hour."

"Oh, well, then, I must endeavour to make an arrangement more suited to your convenience," said the old gentleman. "But I will let you know."

He then bowed once more, and hastened away from the box.

"Well, wasn't I right?" exclaimed Saxondale. "Did you ever see such a figure of fun in all your life?"

"Your lordship should remember," said Florina, in a tone of firm rebuke, "that Mr. Gunthorpe is a friend of my uncle's. Besides, he is an old gentleman, and should be treated with respect. Look," she added, handing Edmund the letter which was addressed to herself and over which she had just glanced her eyes, "you see what my uncle says."

Lord Saxondale took the letter, the laconic contents of which were as follows:

"NAPLES, May 23, 1844.

"MY DEAR NIECE: — The bearer of this is my intimate friend, Mr. Gunthorpe, who for many years has been the most considerable English banker in Naples. He has now retired from business, and is returning to England. I know that you will show him every becoming attention.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"EAGLEDEAN."

" The letter addressed to me is as near as possible to the same effect," observed Lord Harold, reading over Saxondale's shoulder the one just quoted. " But really, to think that I can show any studied attentions to this Mr. Gunthorpe — "

His words were interrupted by a sudden burst of applause which shook the entire house, and all eyes were in a moment directed to the stage, on which the débutante had just made her appearance. She was a heavenly creature, of sylphid form, airy lightness, and exquisite grace, and her beauty was of the most ravishing description. But it is not our intention to prolong this chapter by a description of Signora Vivaldi, inasmuch as we shall shortly have to introduce her more particularly to our readers, and shall then do ample justice to her rare attractions. For the present it will be sufficient to observe that her début was eminently successful, and that her dancing was the most finished illustration of " the poetry of motion " ever exhibited upon the stage.

When the performance was over, the brilliant assembly began to melt away; and during half an hour the Haymarket and Pall Mall resounded with the cries of men summoning the different carriages. Hundreds of the proudest names of the British aristocracy were thus vociferated forth in rapid succession, while the roll of wheels, the trampling of horses, the crashing of steps let up and down, and the banging of carriage doors likewise mingled their sounds in one tremendous din. But at length the throng of equipages, with their prancing steeds and glaring lights, dispersed in all directions, and amongst the last that thus rolled away was that which bore Lord Harold Staunton's party from the doors of the opera.

CHAPTER VI

THE NOBLE INTIMATES

On the following Monday, at about noon, Lord Harold Staunton's valet knocked gently at the door of his master's bedroom, and in meek reply to the demand, " Who the deuce is that? " ventured to intimate that it was ten minutes past twelve o'clock. Thereupon Lord Harold bade his domestic enter, and sitting up in bed, he yawned fearfully, observing, " 'Pon my soul, it doesn't seem as if I had slept an hour. Are you sure it is so late, Alfred? "

" Quite sure, my lord," was the answer given by the valet, who was a man of about thirty, bustling, active, and yet doing his business in that easy and quiet way which showed his experience in the position which he filled.

" Any letters, Alfred? " asked Lord Harold.

The valet produced several, and the young nobleman, still sitting up in bed, began to open them, one after another, with the aristocratic languor which was partly affected and partly arising from the influence of late hours.

" These letters," he observed, musing audibly, " may be divided into two distinct classes, the invitations and the dunning ones, and I am not sure but that the last predominate. It seems, Alfred, that some of my tradesmen are getting rather pressing and impertinent."

" They certainly do not know how to behave themselves, my lord," returned the valet, as he arranged his noble master's shaving apparatus, hair-brushes, oils, pomatums, scents, and other requisites upon the toilet-table.

" Don't you think, Alfred, that my old uncle the marquis ought to be ashamed of himself? " said Lord Harold, throwing himself lazily back again upon the pillow. " Was there ever such a thing heard of before, as a nobleman with some thirty thousand a year allowing his nephew, who is also his heir,

a wretched, paltry, miserable eight hundred? If it weren't for my worthy old aunt, Lady Macdonald, who draws her purse-strings as freely as she can, I don't know how the devil I should manage. But, after all, to have an income of about twelve hundred a year altogether, and yet spend five thousand, is a state of affairs which must necessarily have its troubles."

"To be sure, my lord," observed the valet, "and these creditors are getting very troublesome. Of course I say all I possibly can to them, representing that your lordship is in daily expectation of considerable funds from the Marquis of Eagledean, and that the moment the money arrives they will all be paid."

"And yet you see, Alfred, that they are very far from being satisfied," rejoined Lord Harold.

"They are most unreasonable, my lord."

"They are, indeed, or else they would not be pestering me with these abominable dunning letters. I wish to Heaven I was in the House of Peers. I would bring in a bill to make it felony for a tradesman to write a dunning letter to a nobleman. But when my old uncle dies, and when I do succeed to the peerage, the very first thing I will propose is something of that sort."

"Your lordship will be pursuing a very wise course," said the valet. "The impudence of tradesmen is nowadays astonishing."

"I wish I could throw these vagabonds of creditors overboard, as young Lord Cecil Stafford has done," observed Harold. "He went through the Insolvent's Court the other day with flying colours, to the tune of sixty thousand, and though he was opposed by twenty creditors in person and nine barristers retained specially, the commissioner took his part and discharged him at once."

"The commissioner behaved admirably, my lord," said the valet.

"Yes, most admirably; and the very next day, Lord Cecil, to show his gratitude, went in a four-in-hand to thank him personally for his politeness. The commissioner was no doubt glad to see him in such good form within four and twenty hours of leaving the Queen's Bench."

"It must have been a very gratifying sight, my lord, to the commissioner," remarked the valet.

" Very indeed," and with these words the young nobleman emerged from his couch.

Having performed his toilet so far as the process of shaving, ablutions, and hair-anointing went, he put on his morning *déshabillé*, consisting of an immense pair of trousers of a kind of shawl pattern, red morocco slippers, and a dressing-gown of the costliest figured silk, with a gold cord confining it at the waist; and thus airily apparelled, like a Turkish pasha, he passed into his sitting-room, where breakfast was spread upon a table. And a most inviting repast it was, consisting of everything to tempt the appetite in the shape of coffee and chocolate, ham and tongue, cold chickens, raised French pies, new-laid eggs, hot rolls, and the freshest watercresses gathered by some poor girl who had risen for the purpose at that hour when Lord Harold himself was just seeking his couch. Having in his own words, " just picked a little bit," the young nobleman took up the newspaper and read the account of Signora Vivaldi's splendid triumph on the Saturday night previous, and scarcely had he finished the perusal when Lord Saxondale was announced.

Be it understood that although the preceding day was the Sabbath, yet the two young aristocrats, having dined together, had adjourned to some place of dissipated resort, where they supped and drank freely of champagne, so that it was not till daylight that they sought repose. Lord Harold, being three or four years older than his companion and of much stronger constitution, could better sustain the effects of a debauch; and, indeed, after a few hours' sleep he scarcely felt them, much less bore their marks upon his countenance; whereas young Saxondale, being still little better than a mere boy, and by no means of vigorous health, was invariably punished by his sensations in the morning for the previous night's follies. Accordingly, as he now made his appearance, the bluish circles about his eyes, the redness of the eyes themselves, his parched lips, and pale cheeks, sufficiently indicated all that he felt.

" I am regular out of sorts this morning," he said, flinging himself upon a chair. " A thundering headache, such a tightness across the forehead, and a horrible sickness of the stomach. Look how my hand shakes, too."

" Take a bottle of soda-water, with some brandy," suggested Lord Harold.

The invitation was accepted, the bell was rung, the soda-water and brandy brought up and disposed of, and now the hectic flush produced by fresh stimulation appeared upon Saxondale's cheeks.

" The papers speak splendidly of the signora's success on Saturday night," said Lord Harold. " What a magnificent creature she is! "

" I would give the world to know her," returned Lord Saxondale. " And, to tell you the truth, I should have lain in bed all day to nurse myself, if it hadn't been that I wanted to speak to you upon this subject."

" Well, go on," said Harold. " Tell me what you want."

" Oh, deuce take it," said Saxondale, pettishly, " you know very well what I want, — to get introduced somehow or another to Signora Vivaldi; and as you can always manage this sort of thing, I want you to do it in the present instance."

" And what would Florina say," asked Harold, " if she knew that her brother was helping her intended husband to an acquaintance with a beautiful dancer? "

" In the first place, Florina need know nothing at all about it," replied Edmund, " and, in the second place, it's no reason because I am engaged to be married to your sister when I am twenty-one, that I am to remain an anchorite in the meantime."

" I was only joking, Saxondale," exclaimed Harold. " But, seriously speaking, we must really get acquainted with this delightful creature. The newspaper of this morning says that though she has been nearly all her life in Italy, she is not an Italian by birth, and it ventures to hint that she is of English parentage. It's quite true that she has little of the Italian about her, except the graces of the daughters of the sunny South; for as to her beauty, there is nothing Italian in that brilliancy of complexion which puts even the fairest skins of our English girls to shame."

" Oh, but there are fair Italian women as well as dark ones," observed Saxondale. " I have read so in a book. But whether Italian or English, this Signora Vivaldi is the most enchanting creature I ever saw in all my life, — Lady Florina of course excepted. And now, is it possible to get introduced to her? "

" You heard what we were told behind the scenes at the opera last night," said Lord Harold, " that the signora is

the most discreet and virtuous of young ladies, that she is attended by an old duenna who looks as sour as vinegar, and screws up her face most awfully if even an eye be too intently fixed upon her fair charge, and that when at rehearsal the signora keeps herself as aloof as circumstances can possibly admit from both the male and female performers in the ballet. Why, it seems to be even a secret known only to the lessee and the ballet-master where she lives, and neither of them is at all likely to give the information."

"Oh, but her residence is easily found out," exclaimed Edmund. "When leaving the opera, she must of a necessity ride home in a carriage, hackney-coach, or some kind of vehicle, and it will be easy enough to get a person to follow it."

"Granted," said Lord Harold. "But when you have found out her place of abode, what course would you adopt? I do not think that, from all we heard last night, she would give us a very gracious reception if we went boldly to call upon her. Yet there are ways and means, and these must be thought of. In the first place, I will instruct Alfred to endeavour to follow her from the theatre, the next time she makes her appearance. Alfred is a cunning, astute fellow, with all his sedateness of look and mealy-mouthiness of words, and he will be sure to discover the fair one's abode. This once done, we can deliberate how to proceed."

"I was thinking," remarked Saxondale, "whether, if you were to draw me up some appropriate little billet, I might not send it to her. By addressing it to the opera, it would be sure to reach her — "

"And be treated with contempt," added Staunton.

"Yes, but who ever believed in the virtue of an actress or a dancing-girl?" exclaimed Saxondale, contemptuously.

"All rules have an exception, and in this case our phœnix of beauty and mystery seems to constitute that exception. However, I will do the best I can for you in the matter, and, as a preliminary, will set Alfred to discover her residence. We will then take measures accordingly. But now, my dear fellow, I want you to do me a little favour in your turn."

"Anything but in the money way," replied Saxondale, "for I am as hard up to-day as you can possibly be. Just before I came out, I told my mother that I had nothing left at the banker's, and desired her to ask my guardians for

some cash, but she positively refused. So I gave her my mind, and came off in high dudgeon. Now, as for applying direct to my guardians, it's out of the question. I should only get a good blowing up, and I can't talk to them in the same free and easy style as I do to my mother. They won't stand it."

"Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow, are they not?" inquired Harold.

"Yes, those are my blessed guardians," rejoined Saxondale, "and what with the surly old peer and the businesslike lawyer, I have to deal with two confounded impracticable fellows. The last time I applied to them, they told me I had a splendid allowance for a young nobleman under age, and must make it do; but one's guardians always seem to think that an income which will barely supply shoe-leather is uncommon liberal."

"This is very awkward," said Lord Harold, both looking and feeling vexed, "for I am in rather a mess at present, several creditors bothering me, and must get two or three thousand or so by some means or another. I shouldn't have thought of asking you, my dear Edmund, considering that I am already your debtor to the amount of a cool five thousand —"

"Oh, that be hanged!" ejaculated Saxondale. "You know if I had the money you should not be in want of it for another minute. But surely there must be some way of raising the wind?"

"Of course," answered Lord Harold. "There are money-brokers, and bill-brokers, and discounters, and usurers enough in the City, but the deuce of it is, that I am afraid my introduction wouldn't exactly do. I am in rather deep with them myself."

"An idea strikes me," ejaculated the youthful heir of Saxondale, his ignoble countenance suddenly brightening up. "That old fellow Gunthorpe —"

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Lord Harold, catching at the hint, "he might be made useful. Let me see, my uncle's letter says that Mr. Gunthorpe was for many years the most eminent banker in Italy, and now he is retired from business. Depend upon it, he's as rich as Crœsus, and if we can only get on the blind side of him — But that's difficult, though, a banker and a sharp old fellow into the

bargain. However, there is nothing like trying. So here goes."

With these words, Lord Harold jumped up, fetched his writing desk from a side-table, sat down, and penned the following lines upon the best cream-laid paper:

"JERMYN STREET, Monday, Noon.

"MY DEAR MR. GUNTHORPE: — I had not an opportunity on Saturday evening of saying all the civil things I ought and meant, but perhaps you will do me the honour of dining with me to-morrow, at half-past six. We shall be quite alone, with the exception of my very particular friend, Lord Saxondale.

"I remain, my dear Mr. Gunthorpe,

"Yours very faithfully,

"HAROLD STAUNTON."

"Now, what do you think of that?" asked his lordship, as he handed the letter to young Saxondale for his perusal.

"Nothing can be better," was the response. "You must give the old boy a capital dinner and plenty of wine, for he looks as if he loved good cheer and could take his glass; and then, when we have once got him nicely warmed over the bottle, we will see whether we can't manage to draw him of a few thousands."

"On our joint security," added Staunton. "It will be capital. I really do begin to think we are pretty certain to succeed. These trading, money-making people are always ready to worship a lord, and it's clear that old Gunthorpe wants to get into good society, by bringing those letters of introduction. But how on earth he could have taken up his abode at such an outrageous place as the Bell and Crown is difficult to conceive. However, we will not trouble ourselves on that score, but will despatch the letter at once."

This was accordingly done, and Lord Harold then returned to his bedchamber to dress himself, while young Saxondale yawned over the newspaper. When the toilet of the former was accomplished, they strolled out and repaired to the billiard-rooms, where they played for about an hour. But at length Saxondale, flinging down the cue, declared his hand shook so he could not make another stroke; and though he took two or three glasses of neat brandy to steady it,

the alcohol produced not the desired effect, and so the game was abandoned. They then proceeded to the stables belonging to Saxondale Mansion, and mounting a couple of horses, went for a ride in the park, attended by a groom. Having ridden twice around, they dismounted, left their horses with the groom, and entered the enclosure, to have a chat with the pretty nurse-maids who were attending upon the children playing about, and in this way another hour was spent. They then returned to their horses and rode down to Tattersall's, where they looked in, "just to see what was going on," and afterward proceeded to a club in St. James's Street, where they posted themselves at the bow-window to ogle the women who passed by. This brought on six o'clock, and then they deliberated for half an hour where they should dine. Staunton suggested a Bond Street hotel, but Saxondale declared, with a more affected crack in his voice than ever, that the turtle was not good there, and accordingly proposed another place, to which Staunton had a similar objection in respect to the venison of this establishment. They had almost decided upon a third when they recollected that the ice-punch was by no means of good quality the last time they were there, and the name of a fourth hotel was likewise blackballed, on the score that there was never enough of cayenne in the soup. A fifth hotel was discussed for ten minutes, but also eschewed, not through any fault in the culinary department, but because the proprietor had attended to oppose Lord Cecil Stafford when he went through the court; and a sixth was discarded because the head waiter had such very bad teeth. Ultimately these two aristocratic coxcombs decided upon their dining-place, and thither did they repair.

The important process of dinner engaged them up till nearly ten o'clock, and then they issued forth to smoke their cigars in the Quadrant, and look at the women parading there. Lord Harold was perfectly sober, but his friend admitted to him, with the mysterious confidence of inebriation, that he was already "more than half-seas over." Having taken a few strolls up and down the Quadrant, — the arcade of which was not then cleared away, — they agreed upon adjourning to some place of amusement, and, after due deliberation, decided upon the gaming-table. They accordingly turned out of the Quadrant into one of

the diverging streets, and stopped at a door over which a brilliant gas-lamp was burning. Here they knocked and rung, and the door was instantaneously opened by a porter who was always on the alert within. They entered, and the door was immediately closed again. Nodding familiarly to the porter, who evidently knew them well, they proceeded along the passage to a second door, which even the most superficial observer might perceive to be of extraordinary strength and solidity; indeed, it was plated all over with iron. A small wicket, about a foot square, was opened in this door, and a man's countenance peered through for a moment; but recognizing the two noblemen, this second porter, to whom that countenance belonged, closed the wicket and proceeded to open the door itself. Heavy bolts were heard to draw back and chains to fall, thus evincing no ordinary precautions on the part of the proprietors of the gambling-house to barricade themselves against the incursions of the police.

Passing on, and again nodding familiarly to the official, Harold and Edmund ascended a carpeted staircase, and reached a handsomely furnished room, of spacious dimensions, with the gaming-table in the middle and a well-spread sideboard at the extremity. This sideboard was covered with refreshments, including the choicest descriptions of French wines. The table in the centre, unlike the old-fashioned *rouge-et-noir* tables, was square, or, rather, oblong, covered with green baize, and having billiard-pockets at the four corners and on each side. It was also contrived in such a manner that all around there were movable borders, or ledges, which might be raised so as to form the cushions of a regular billiard-table; but as these borders were now let down flat, by means of their hinges, the table presented an unbroken surface.

The croupiers, or managers of the gaming-table, were seated in their proper places, with their rakes in their hands, and green shades over their eyes to screen them from the exceeding vividness of the light thrown by the gas-lamps suspended above the board. The bank, or stock of money, was contained in a large cash-box placed on the table before the senior croupier. But on the right hand of this individual was a very extraordinary-looking piece of mechanism, standing upon a pedestal. This instrument

had the appearance of a coffee-grinder, with the bowl to receive whatever was to be ground, and the handle to work the grinding machinery, but instead of having any visible opening for the ground material to run out of, that part of the mill where this opening ought to be was fixed in the pedestal.

To complete the description of the several features which the interior of this room presented to the view, we must add that there were three or four bells hanging against the wall, having wires of communication with the various parts of the house, even up to the very roof, in order that those who were on the watch above, below, and outside in the back part of the premises, might be enabled to give timely warning at the first appearance of anything like alarm.

There were upwards of a dozen persons around the table, occupied in playing, when Lord Harold and Edmund entered the room. Some of these individuals were sitting as quiet and composedly as if engaged in the most matter-of-fact proceeding; others were standing, and these were the feverish and excited players. But of those who were seated, two or three were mere "decoys," that is to say, persons actually hired by the proprietor of the place not only for the purpose of always keeping the game going, but likewise of encouraging the unwary and inexperienced to stake their money. This being what is termed "a fashionable hell," only a certain class of individuals were admitted, namely, those who were known to belong to the wealthy circles; and thus, so far as apparel and outward appearances went, the company were in that sense "respectable" enough. But if their characters came to be closely scrutinized and deeply probed, the investigation would doubtless have afforded an additional proof to the thousand and one already existing that the villainy and profligacy which broadcloth and fine linen cover are far greater than the vice and depravity which lurk beneath fustian or downright rags.

Neither Lord Harold Staunton nor Lord Saxondale had much money in their pockets at the time to play with, but still they had a few five-pound notes and sovereigns between them, and these they ventured upon the chances of the game. They had been thus occupied for about half an hour, and had lost the greater portion of what they had put down, when one of the bells suddenly rang furiously.

"Top of the house!" ejaculated one of the croupiers, distinguishing at a glance which bell it was that rung, and therefore from which quarter the alarm proceeded.

Confusion and dismay seized upon the two young noblemen and the five or six least experienced individuals present, but the older hands, including the croupiers and the decoys, showed no bewilderment or excitement at all; and though their actions were prompt, yet what they did do was done with calmness and self-possession. One of the croupiers took out all the bank-notes and gold from the cash-box, which he placed upon a shelf, securing the money about his person. The other croupier and the decoys threw the tops of the rakes (which were immediately broken off), together with the ivory counters, the dice, and the dice-boxes, into the coffee-mill, where half a dozen turns of the handle served to grind all those objects if not actually to powder, at all events into morsels too small to answer the purposes of evidence before a magistrate. The borders or edges of the table were put up, cues and balls were simultaneously produced, and by the time the police broke in, which they did in a very few minutes, the aspect of the scene was altogether changed. Not the slightest trace of an ordinary gaming-table was there, — merely a billiard-table at which several gentlemen seemed to be playing a quiet comfortable game, when the door was flung violently open and an inspector with half a dozen constables made their appearance.

"Ah! you have been too quick for us, eh?" ejaculated the inspector, with a glance embracing the aspect of things, and perfectly well aware of all that had been done. "However," he added, "we will see if we can't bring it home to you. Keep the door, lads."

"What do you mean by coming into a respectable house like this?" demanded the head croupier, assuming the indignant.

"Come, Mr. Jameson, none of your nonsense," said the inspector. "You know very well that I am acquainted with you and up to all your dodges. Respectable house indeed! Very respectable, when it's so barricaded down below that we are obliged to force our way in by the attics, and even there you have got a man posted on the lookout. I suppose you will have an electric telegraph laid on next?"

" Thank you for the hint," said the principal croupier, bursting out laughing, and he winked knowingly to his comrades.

" Now let us look at this machine," continued the inspector, advancing up to the coffee-mill.

But the pedestal stood so firm that it seemed to resist all his attempts to move it. He however retreated a pace or two, and, applying his foot with a backward kick, broke it clean off on a level with the floor, so that what had appeared to be a pedestal was in reality nothing more than a hollow tube, or pipe, which passed completely through the flooring and down which the crushed objects went.

" Where does your coffee go when you have ground it? " asked the inspector, ironically.

" All the way down into the sewers, for the benefit of the poor devils who search those places," coolly answered the croupier. " If you want a sample of the coffee, you will have to go down into the sewer to get it, and then there's the chance of its having been all washed away."

" Well, I shall take this with me," said the inspector, lifting up the mill and the piece of the tube on the top of which it was fixed, " and I shall take all you along with me likewise."

" What does the fellow mean? " cried Saxondale. " Take us with him! What, me, Lord — "

" Hush. Nonsense! " exclaimed Harold. " You are Jenkins and I am Mr. Tomkins. So now away to the station-house. We will send and get bail in half an hour."

" Oh, if that's all, it will be a capital lark," cried Saxondale, " and to-morrow when we give our names as Jenkins and Tomkins, we shall puzzle the magistrate a bit."

To be brief, the whole party were marched off to the station-house, which was close at hand, and there the two young noblemen waited while they sent for persons to bail them. Four of Lord Saxondale's tradesmen were speedily found for the purpose, and soon after midnight the liberated aristocrats were strolling arm in arm down to Covent Garden to pass an hour at a " free-and-easy " nightly held by a hotel-keeper in that neighbourhood. It was two in the morning when Edmund, most particularly drunk, was helped out of a cab at the door of Saxondale mansion, helped into the house by the hall-porter, helped up to his

chamber by a footman, and then helped into bed by his own valet.

On the following morning he awoke with a more awful headache than ever, and though he could scarcely drag himself from his couch was nevertheless compelled to repair to the Marlborough Street police office in discharge of his bail. When the case was called on, the magistrate expressed an opinion that he could do nothing, as no evidence was produced to show that the house was one for gaming, much less that the prisoners were illegally gambling at the time of their arrest. They were all therefore discharged, and our two young noblemen quitted the office arm in arm, laughing heartily at the adventure.

Lord Harold now informed his friend that he had received a note from Mr. Gunthorpe accepting the invitation; whereupon Edmund declared that he should go home and lie down for two or three hours for the purpose of " getting all right," so as enjoy himself in the evening. They accordingly separated for the present, Lord Harold proceeding to Jermyn Street, and Lord Saxondale to Park Lane.

But on arriving at the mansion, the latter was informed, when about to ascend to his bedchamber, that his mother desired to speak with him upon a very important subject. His first impulse was to send a message to her ladyship to the effect that he would see her in the course of the day, but on second thoughts he fancied it better to adopt a more conciliatory policy, in case the Gunthorpe project might fail and he should find himself compelled to have recourse to her ladyship after all for the replenishment of his purse. He accordingly proceeded to the drawing-room where she was seated.

CHAPTER VII

DOMESTIC SCENES IN HIGH LIFE

Lady Saxondale was now forty years of age, and was perhaps one of the most splendidly handsome women belonging to the aristocracy of this country. Hers was a style of beauty which, although so precocious in the spring-time of its youthful developments, was that which preserves the best; and without having expanded into corpulency or stoutness, her form had acquired just a sufficiency of embonpoint to set off that matronly stateliness which so well became her. Thus her fine figure, still preserving the proper symmetry of proportions, was not luxuriant so as to destroy its grace, nor of contours too full to be compatible with elegance; while it gave her all that majesty of demeanour and queenly dignity of look which so admirably suited the haughty cast of her aquiline countenance. The pearly whiteness of the teeth remained in all its earliest perfection, the fires of youth still seemed flashing in her large dark eyes, and no streak of silver marred the raven blackness of her shining hair.

Her ladyship was clad in a dark dress trimmed with the richest lace. The room in which she was seated was spacious, lofty, and splendidly furnished. The heavy crimson draperies at the windows subdued the powerful lustre of the sultry sun, and vases of flowers gave a freshness to the hot and languid atmosphere of that summer day's noon. To the walls were suspended several fine pictures, and all objects in the apartment were reproduced in the splendid mirrors that appeared on every side.

When Edmund entered the room he found his mother seated in an armchair near the centre table, and the grave severity of her look, as well as the drawn-up stateliness of

her demeanour, at once convinced him that he was about to have what he termed " a scene."

But, for the reasons specified at the conclusion of the previous chapter, he resolved to adopt a conciliatory policy, if it were practicable; and therefore he somewhat mitigated the air of insolent defiance with which he had lately been wont to meet the maternal remonstrances or reproaches. Still his temper was on the point of failing him when he beheld the deep severity of his mother's looks, — a severity not altogether unmingled with an expression of loathing and disgust, as her scrutinizing regards embraced at a glance all the evidences which his appearance furnished of the previous night's debauchery.

" Sit down, Edmund," said her ladyship, " for I wish to speak to you upon some matters of importance."

" Well, my dear lady-mother," answered the youth, sinking languidly down upon a sofa, " let us hear what you have got to say, and you shall find me the most attentive of listeners."

" Be so good as to divest yourself of this most unbecoming flippancy of manner," proceeded Lady Saxondale, fixing her eagle eyes almost sternly upon the youth, " for it amounts to an impertinence which I do not choose to tolerate."

" Now, upon my soul, this is too bad! " cried Saxondale, his affected voice thrilling into a positive screech. " I made my appearance with the most dutiful demeanour that I could command for the occasion, so if there's to be any quarrel, it will be of your picking."

" Quarrel, sir! how dare you make use of this language to me? "

" Come, mother, don't put yourself into a passion — ".

" Silence! — and listen to me. You have lately been pursuing a career of the most degrading and revolting debauchery — "

" You have told me this over and over again, if that's all you wanted me for."

" Again I enjoin you to silence," interrupted Lady Saxondale, fiercely, " for remember, you are not yet your own master, and during the year and ten months which have yet to elapse ere you attain your majority, your guardians and myself are determined to do our duty in the endeavour to reclaim you from these vicious courses which you are

pursuing. Now, Edmund," she continued, in a somewhat milder tone, " I have besought, I have entreated, I have implored, I have likewise scolded, threatened, and menaced, but all to no purpose. With the deepest affliction do I behold you daily plunging more profoundly into the vortex of dissipation, constantly absent from home, remaining out late at nights, spending your money Heaven only knows how, and, I fear, frequenting the worst society."

" What do you mean? " exclaimed Edmund, sharply. " Lord Harold Staunton is my constant companion, and he is the brother of the young lady whom you yourself selected as my future wife."

" Florina is an amiable, excellent, and well-principled girl," said Lady Saxondale, " but I regret to add that her brother is very different. She herself knows not, nor is it proper that she should learn, the extent of the dissipations into which he plunges. She thinks him rather too gay, wild, and extravagant, but she does not suspect that he is a confirmed gambler, a reckless spendthrift, and an inveterate debauchee. Nor at the time when it was arranged that you should become her suitor was I myself aware of the profligacy of his character, or else perhaps I might have hesitated to initiate and sanction an engagement which thus threw you into such evil companionship. But it is now too late to retract from that engagement — "

" Besides which, it would be rather difficult to do so without my consent," interjected the youthful lord, flippantly. " I am deuced fond of the girl, and am quite willing to marry her to-morrow if you choose, instead of waiting for my majority."

" No, sir," interrupted Lady Saxondale, sternly. " I have on a former occasion stated to you that by an addition to your father's will — an addition that was made within the month following your birth — it was chronicled as his solemn wish that you should not marry until you had obtained your majority, but that you should then enter the wedded state as early as might be convenient."

" No doubt my father had a very high opinion of the wedded state," observed Edmund, piqued by his mother's tone and manner, " since he himself twice entered it. But pray continue your observations, for, to tell you the truth,

I have got a thundering headache and want to go and lie down."

"Unhappy boy, you are adopting a suicidal course by these profligacies and dissipations," cried Lady Saxondale. "But beware! Tractable and obedient as Florina is to the will of her aunt, yet if her delicacy be shocked by a discovery of the full extent of your vices she may assert her right to have her own happiness considered, and thus withdraw from the engagement."

"No, I don't think it at all likely," rejoined the young man, superciliously. "In the first place, I know she is desperately fond of me; and, in the second place, it is too good a match for her, poor and portionless as she is, to break off."

"I hope that your opinions are indeed well founded," said Lady Saxondale. "But I will now come to the point and explain to you the purport for which I desired this interview. Your guardians, Lord Petersfield and Mr. Malton, paid me a visit yesterday, and we had a long and serious conversation together. They positively insist that I withdraw you for a time from the temptations of a London life, and I therefore propose that we repair to Saxondale Castle to pass some time, — perhaps the whole interval until your majority. Lady Macdonald and Florina will be our visitors there, so that you may enjoy the company of your intended bride."

"What, go and bury myself in that out-of-the-way place!" exclaimed Edmund, starting up from the sofa. "No, I'll be hanged if I do!"

"In that case," responded Lady Saxondale, endeavouring to maintain her dignified calmness, but all the evidences of her ill-suppressed indignation betraying themselves in her flushing cheeks, her fire-darting eyes, and her quivering lips, "in that case," she repeated, with strong accentuation, "it is Lord Petersfield's resolve to obtain for you the post of attaché to some distant and petty embassy, so as to remove you from London."

"And what if I refuse to go, eh? What then?" demanded the young lord, with mingled insolence and malignity.

"Then, as it is in her Majesty's service," replied Lady Saxondale, "you will be ordered abroad, and at your peril will you refuse."

" Well, we shall see," was Edmund's dogged answer.

" Ah! but this is not all. Your guardians will stop your allowance," continued Lady Saxondale, her lips now ashy with the pent-up rage that filled her bosom.

" Well, then, I must raise money with the bill-brokers in the City," rejoined Edmund.

" Wicked and perverse boy," cried Lady Saxondale, now no longer able to repress her wrath, and starting up from her chair, she stamped her foot violently upon the carpet, " do you mean to defy me altogether? "

" I told you, at the beginning, that if there was a quarrel, it would be of your provoking."

" Quarrel, sir! A mother cannot quarrel with her son. She orders, and he obeys."

" The deuce he does! I think rather differently," exclaimed Edmund, with a taunting laugh.

" Vile and detestable disposition that you possess! " exclaimed the lady, whose haughty beauty now looked terrible in her anger. " If you only knew how much I suffered on your account when you were an infant, if you only knew how much I have done for you — But, no; you are incapable of appreciating it."

" Oh, this is the old story over again," interrupted Edmund, with so heartless a flippancy that his words and his manner were but too well calculated to plant daggers in the bosom of Lady Saxondale. " Because I was lost or stolen when an infant, and you discovered me again, you are always flinging it in my teeth."

" Edmund! Edmund! do for Heaven's sake treat me with more kindness, more respect," said the unhappy lady, now bursting into tears. " Oh, again I tell you that if you only knew all I have suffered on your account, you would not treat me thus. Consider, reflect! Your behaviour is most unnatural, most ungrateful."

" Then why can't you leave me alone? " demanded the young man, entirely unmoved by the spectacle of that proud and haughty woman thus melting into the humiliation of tears and entreaties in his presence and through his conduct.

" Ah, I see that you are indeed heartless, thoroughly heartless! " she exclaimed, suddenly drawing her handkerchief across her eyes, and in a moment recovering the stern stateliness of her demeanour. " Never again will I appeal

to you, Edmund, for kindness and respect. Never again will I seek to touch your sympathies. Perverse boy, instead of imploring or entreating, I will act and command."

"Well, then, I suppose it's a war to the knife," he observed, with flippant disdain, "and we shall see who will get the better of it."

Thus speaking, he gave another taunting laugh and lounged out of the room. The moment the door closed behind him, a terrible change came over Lady Saxondale; her entire appearance altered, her countenance became positively ghastly, her lips ashy white, and her whole frame convulsed with the inward working of the fiercest passions.

"Viper, that I have cherished in my bosom to sting me!" she said, aloud, and the words came hissing from between her parched lips. "I hate him, yes, I hate him!"

But then she stopped short and glanced with a sudden start of uneasiness toward a door at the extremity of the apartment, for it struck her that a sound resembling a cry of dismay, penetrating thence, had been wafted to her ear. Instantaneously recovering all her self-possession, she approached that door, opened it abruptly, and beheld her two daughters quite near enough and in an attitude to show they had been listening.

That inner room was one where the young ladies were not wont to sit at this period of the day, and therefore it had never occurred to Lady Saxondale, throughout the preceding interview with her son, that Juliana and Constance were by any probability so near. She fancied that they were in a more distant apartment, occupied with their music, drawing, or embroidery, and consequently their presence in that room, as well as the indications above mentioned, naturally struck her with the suspicion that they had penetrated thither on purpose to listen to what was taking place between Edmund and herself. We may add that Juliana, the eldest, was a perfect likeness of her mother, with the same haughty, aquiline profile, hair of the same raven glossiness, eyes of the same dark splendour, a complexion of the same clear, delicate olive, and a figure modelled with a like voluptuous symmetry of proportions. Constance, the younger, though possessing the same Hebe proportions of shape, was in all other respects of a different style of beauty, having light hair, a complexion of dazzling transparency,

and blue eyes, while the outline of her features was more delicate and more strictly classical, with nothing of that haughtiness of expression which characterized both her mother and her sister.

" What means this? " demanded Lady Saxondale, sternly. " Is it not sufficient that I should possess an undutiful and rebellious son, but am I also doomed to find that my daughters are playing the part of spies upon their mother's actions? "

" Spies! " echoed Juliana, the elder, her delicate brunette complexion suffusing with the glow of indignation at the charge.

" Oh, do not be angry with us, dear mother," cried Constance, the younger, bursting into tears.

The difference of the manner in which the two young ladies received their mother's reproach must at a glance afford the reader an accurate insight into their respective dispositions, showing that whereas the former was characterized by the proud and haughty spirit of Lady Saxondale, the latter was all gentleness, meekness, and affectionate submission.

" Explain this conduct on your part," said the indignant mother; and though her two daughters were tall, yet her own stature was elevated above them to the majestic height of Diana the Huntress.

" It is somewhat too hard," returned Juliana, almost in a tone of defiance, " to be taunted with having wilfully played the part of spies, when it was really all the result of accident," and having thus spoken, the Honourable Miss Farefield walked toward the window.

" Constance," said Lady Saxondale, addressing her younger daughter, in a milder tone than she had previously used, " you will at least give your mother a satisfactory and respectful answer."

" It is as Juliana has said," replied Constance, " the result of accident. Tired of our music and drawing, we each resolved to commence a piece of tambour-work, and thought of copying two of the pictures in this room. So we came hither with our frames, which are there," and with her white hand she pointed in the direction to which her sweet blue eyes also glanced. " But scarcely had we entered, not five minutes ago, when we were startled by hearing high words

in the next room, and recognizing Edmund's voice, we instinctively approached the door to listen. The action was so quick on our part that I did not pause for a moment to reflect that it might be wrong, and I am sure it was the same with Juliana."

"And what did you hear?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Come, speak, miss, tell me what you heard?" she added, more sternly, seeing that her daughter hesitated and looked frightened.

"Oh, my dear mother," exclaimed Constance, bursting into tears, "I heard you beseech and implore Edmund to treat you with kindness and respect, and it cut me to the quick to think that you should have thus to speak to my brother."

"Ah! then you were ear-witnesses, young ladies, of your mother's deep humiliation, her utter degradation?" and as Lady Saxondale spoke with accents of bitterness and implacability, her countenance grew pale with the fierce feelings that raged within her bosom, and her fine, majestic form trembled from head to foot.

"Dear mother, is it something so terrible, something so unpardonable that we have done?" and Constance turned aside to weep more bitterly than before.

"Juliana," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, "come hither, approach me, I say. Wherefore do you thus stand aside and lounge listlessly in that window recess, as if you were indifferent to what is passing?"

"Because I think that your ladyship," answered the Honourable Miss Farefield, "is treating us with unnecessary harshness for a very venial offence, if an offence it be at all." But as she spoke she advanced toward her mother, of whom she still stood in just sufficient awe not to dare defy her altogether.

"There can fall upon a mother's head no curse more withering than that of having disobedient children," said Lady Saxondale, in a strange, deep voice. "You, Constance," she continued, placing her hand caressingly upon the shoulder of her fair-haired younger daughter, "are penitent for this transgression on your part, and you at least treat me with respect. But you, Juliana," she added, turning toward the dark-haired elder girl, "are inclined to display that same rebellious spirit which your brother has dared

assume. However, understand me well. I am not only the mistress of this house, but am likewise your parent, and you are dependent upon me. Therefore, once for all, take heed how you manifest any undutiful conduct toward me."

"One would think that I had committed some grievous crime by the language which your ladyship uses," and as Juliana thus spoke, the rich red blood mantled upon her cheeks and her eyes flashed fire.

"Insolent girl, beware how you provoke me!" cried Lady Saxondale.

Juliana drew herself up haughtily, and turned away with an air of complete defiance.

At this moment a door communicating with the landing outside was flung violently open, and a woman, whose age appeared to be fifty, and who was dressed in the matronly garb of a housekeeper, entered the room, exclaiming, in a sharp, querulous voice, "It is abominable, and I am determined to have satisfaction. My lady, I demand protection at your hands. I cannot be insulted any longer in this way; it exceeds all human patience. The impertinent coxcomb, the petty tyrant, the cowardly hound!"

"Mabel, what in Heaven's name does all this mean?" cried Lady Saxondale, rushing toward the old housekeeper, for such was the situation occupied by the woman at the mansion. "Compose yourself, tranquillize your feelings; you know that I will not suffer you to be insulted with impunity."

"But this is constantly going on," Mabel again burst forth, advancing farther into the room, and both speaking and looking as if she were desperately angry with everybody and everything. "He is always insulting me. He hates me, just because I possess your ladyship's confidence, and have been in the family for so many years. What did he mean by calling me an old beldame when he met me on the stairs? Was it that on account of my rheumatism I couldn't get out of his way quite quick enough to please my lord? But I will teach him better manners, I will! He shall respect me, the impudent puppy!"

"Mabel, Mabel, mind what you are saying," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, evidently much agitated. "You must not speak thus of his lordship."

"This woman's conduct is perfectly disgusting," said

Juliana, tossing her head indignantly. "Your ladyship just now spoke in the harshest terms to me and Constance for a very trivial thing, and yet you put up with the astounding insolence of a wretched dependent."

"Dependent indeed!" yelled forth Mabel, her spiteful eyes darting reptile-looks of malignity upon the Honourable Miss Farefield. "How dare you speak of me in this way? I tell you that you are a vain and haughty minx, as your brother is a contemptible coxcomb."

"Mabel, I insist upon your holding your tongue," said Lady Saxondale, but rather in a voice of entreaty than command. "Juliana, Constance, retire. I must have some private conversation."

"Private conversation indeed!" echoed Mabel, with increasing rage. "What I want is justice, and I mean to have it, too. To be bullied and badgered by that petty tyrant is beyond all endurance. I hate him, the whole household hates him, everybody hates him; he is a wretched cur!"

"Mother," cried Juliana, "if you do not call the lackeys to turn this woman out of the house —"

"Silence, miss!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot with rage. "Retire, I say."

Constance, the younger girl, was already retreating to the door, both frightened and amazed at this scene with the old housekeeper, a scene which, though not altogether new, was still far more serious than any displays of the kind that had ever previously taken place. Juliana, the elder young lady, flung a look of unmitigated contempt upon Mabel, and walked, with all her mother's stateliness and haughty grandeur, out of the room, closing the door with some degree of violence behind her.

What then took place between Lady Saxondale and her irate housekeeper, we know not. Suffice it to say that they remained alone together for nearly half an hour, and when the old woman emerged from that room again, it was with the mingled sullenness and vixenish acerbity of countenance which plainly indicated that though she had suffered herself to be appeased somehow or another, yet that it was with a very bad grace she had received such satisfaction or apologies as might have been offered, and that in her heart the sense of insult was still rankling bitterly.

Meanwhile, as they were ascending the staircase to their own chamber, the sisters had encountered one of the pages of the household, whom we may at this moment introduce to our readers. He was a youth of about eighteen, and of the most extraordinary beauty. Not very tall, his figure was slight, but as perfectly symmetrical as that of a Grecian statue representing Apollo; and the tasteful livery which he wore, consisting of a jacket tightly buttoned up to his throat, and trousers with two thin red stripes down each leg, set off his elegant shape to the utmost advantage. He had chestnut hair, which he wore long, and was naturally curling and wavy; his forehead was high and as white as that of a maiden; his brows were dark, pencilled in two thin arching lines; his eyes were of deep dazel, large and liquid, but bright as if with subdued fires. He had little colour upon his cheeks, no whiskers nor beard upon his chin, but he was suffering his moustache to grow, and which, delicately pencilled like his brows, relieved his countenance somewhat from its otherwise girlish appearance. His lips were somewhat full, and if they had belonged to a woman, would have been denominated pouting. Being slightly apart, they always afforded a glimpse of a most beautiful set of teeth. Though already described as not of tall stature, yet his graceful length of limb, set off by the becoming apparel which he wore, made him appear taller than he really was; and altogether there was a gracefulness and a gentility about this youth which, when united with his extraordinary personal beauty, rendered him a being who, though clad in a menial garb, could not possibly fail to attract the notice of any one who passed him by. His name was Francis Paton, familiarly called Frank in the household, and he had been in Lady Saxondale's service for about a year.

Such was the youth whom the two sisters encountered upon the stairs as they were ascending to their own chamber to talk over together the scenes which had just occurred in the room below. Constance. the fair-haired girl, who was proceeding first, passed him by with no more notice than a young lady in her position was likely to take of one of the household domestics, but Juliana, the elder damsel, bent upon him for a moment the full power of her magnificent dark eyes; and though the youth immediately flung his own looks downwards and passed rapidly on, yet was the

colour mantling upon his cheeks, and he seemed to be quivering with the excitement of the feelings which that rapid regard had so suddenly conjured up.

The sisters ascended to their chamber, where they remained together for about an hour, at the expiration of which time one of their maids came to announce that Mr. Deveril was waiting below to give them their lesson in ivory-painting.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. GUNTHORPE

In the evening of the same day, punctually at half-past six o'clock, a loud double knock was given at the front door of the house in which Harold Staunton occupied handsome lodgings. He and his friend Lord Saxondale were together in the drawing-room, and at the sound of that knock they approached one of the windows.

"As I live," cried Edmund, "he has come in a hansom patent cab!" and he turned away with a grimace expressive of immitigable disgust.

"I wonder whether Alfred will be able to keep his countenance as he shows him up," observed Lord Harold. "I am sure I could not blame him if he did not. But then," he immediately added, "Alfred is so very discreet and prudent. But what on earth is the old fellow stopping to parley with the cabman for? I do believe he is disputing the fare. Good heavens! what will the people of the house think, what will the neighbours think, what — "

"Yes, and now the quarrel is waxing warmer," cried Saxondale, returning to the window and looking down into the street. "By jingo, this is devilish pleasant! A crowd is already collecting."

"You are nothing better than a reg'lar old bilk," were the words which, being vociferated forth by the indignant cabman, now reached the ears of the two young nobles who were gazing aghast from the first floor windows. "What do you think," pursued the cabman, turning around and appealing to those whom the disturbance had already collected, "this old fogy, with his great shirt-frill, wants me to take sixteen pence for driving him from the Bell and Crown right away up in Holborn, down here to Jarmyn

Street, and I say my fare's two bob, and I won't bate a farden. He's gived me eighteen pence in silver, and demands tuppence change."

"Yes, and I mean to have it, too," said Mr. Gunthorpe, with a most imperturbable coolness. "I asked the landlord of the Bell and Crown what your fare was, and he told me sixteen pence, but I should have given you the eighteen if you were not insolent about it. So now I take your number."

"And pull me up afore the beak, eh?" vociferated the cabman. "Well, so do, and I'm sniggered if I don't have the ground measured at your expense too, old boy. Look at that hoss, d'ye think he wor made to go all this distance for sixteen pence?"

"No, certainly not, nor any distance at all," answered Mr. Gunthorpe, still cool as a cucumber. "His next drive should be to the knackers' yard," and thus speaking, the old gentleman entered the house, the door of which Alfred, who had stood the while aghast as the two nobles up-stairs, immediately shut in the face of the enraged cabman.

Mr. Gunthorpe, duly escorted by Alfred, was ushered into the drawing-room, where Lord Harold received him with as good a face as he could possibly put on, but Lord Saxondale scarcely attempted to conceal his own feelings of horror and disgust at the visitor's conduct.

"I am sorry now that I did not take the omnibus, as I first intended to do," remarked Mr. Gunthorpe, when he had paid his respects to the two noblemen. "The insolence of your London cabmen is perfectly intolerable. Has not your lordship found it so?"

"I never patronize street cabs, Mr. Gunthorpe," replied Harold Staunton.

"For my part, I understand they swarm with vermin," said Lord Saxondale.

"In which case they must be catching," said Mr. Gunthorpe, coolly, "so your lordship had better not come near me."

There was now a pause, for neither of the two young men knew exactly what next to say. They were immeasurably disgusted with their visitor, but as their aim and hope were to make him useful, they dared not give too manifest a display of their feelings. Lord Saxondale therefore adjusted his neck-cloth before the looking-glass, and Lord Harold

hummed an opera air, while contemplating the spotless polish of his patent-leather boots as he sat lazily lolling back in his chair.

"You see I was punctual," said Mr. Gunthorpe, drawing forth a huge old-fashioned gold watch about the size of a turnip, and having a massive chain with at least a dozen large seals and keys by way of appendages. "I have also brought a pretty good appetite with me. I took a chop in the City at one, and have had nothing since."

"Dinner will be served up almost immediately, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lord Harold, conquering his aversion as much as he was able, so as to behave civilly toward the old gentleman. "Have you been very busy in the City to-day?"

"Very busy indeed," was the response. "I and Snuffley — that's my attorney — have had a great deal to do together. If I had not thought it would have been too great a liberty, I should have brought Snuffley with me, but —"

"I should have been charmed to have entertained Mr. Snuffley on your account," said Lord Harold, but he could not prevent himself from speaking in a cold and reserved tone.

"What a funny name," tittered Lord Saxondale. "Snuffley! — he! he! he! But I have noticed that many City men and middle-class people have very queer names."

"One name is as good as another, for anything I know," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, curtly, "and I am sure that Snuffley's name is better at the bottom of a cheque than many a name which has descended to its West End bearer from the Norman Conquest."

"Ah! I date my family back to the time of the Tudors," said Lord Saxondale, drawing himself up with an air of the most consummate conceit.

"And mine is derived from a cellar in Clerkenwell," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "My father, God rest his soul! was a poor shoemaker, and my mother used to take in washing, go out charing, and do little odd jobs of that kind. Such as you see me, my lords, I was educated at a charity-school, and have fought my way up in the world from being a muffin-boy to what I am now," and Mr. Gunthorpe looked complacently around upon the two young aristocrats.

They were aghast. Mingled horror and dismay were depicted upon their countenances, no consideration of any ulterior objects having the power at the moment to cause them to master those feelings. Indeed they could not, it was the natural expression of haughty aristocratic prejudices terribly shocked by the plain unvarnished tale of Mr. Gunthorpe's earlier history. He did not, however, seem to notice the consternation which his narrative had excited, but looked as if he felt far more proud of the position which by his industry, as he represented, he had carved out for himself, than the two young aristocrats could possibly be of their lengthened genealogy and ancestral honours.

The folding-doors at the extremity of the drawing-room were now pompously thrown open, and the dinner-table appeared in the midst of the apartment thus revealed. The noblemen and Mr. Gunthorpe took their seats. The former, having somewhat recovered from their shock, were rather curious to observe how the old gentleman would conduct himself at table, and were terribly afraid that he would be guilty of some awful solecism in etiquette so as to horrify the fastidiousness of Alfred and the footman. They were therefore most agreeably surprised and considerably relieved when they found that he at once appeared as well versed as themselves in all the refinements and niceties of the dinner-table, not tucking his napkin up to his chin, nor eating fish with his knife, nor biting instead of breaking his bread, nor asking for malt liquor, nor falling into any of the little errors which they had expected. He took wine with them, too, in the approved manner; and though he spoke but little, yet so long as the domestics were in the room he did not give utterance to a single syllable at all calculated to shock the aristocratic pride of Lord Harold Staunton or Lord Saxondale.

Thus the dinner passed off agreeably enough; the dessert was placed upon the table, the valet and the footman withdrew, and the decanters began to circulate.

"Do you propose to make a long stay in England, Mr. Gunthorpe?" asked Lord Harold, as he sipped his claret.

"I think of settling here altogether now," was the reply. "I believe your noble uncle the Marquis of Eagledean informed you in the letter of introduction which I presented to your lordship that I have retired from business."

" Yes, from banking."

"Well, from banking, then, if you prefer it. I suppose that the term business is a leetle too vulgar? "

" Between you and me, my dear Mr. Gunthorpe, it is vulgar, excessively vulgar."

" Grates upon one's nerves, eh? " said the old gentleman, seeming to laugh good-naturedly.

" Oh, terribly! " cried Lord Saxondale. " To me it's just like cutting iron with a file."

" Well, then," proceeded Mr. Gunthorpe, " as I was observing, I have retired from banking, and mean to settle down somewhere in England. I told Snuff— I beg your pardon, my attorney, I mean; I won't mention his name, because that also will most likely grate upon your nerves, but I told him to look out and see if he could purchase me an estate — "

" Ah! but mind what you are doing, Mr. Gunthorpe," exclaimed Lord Harold. " Don't leave it to your solicitor."

" Solicitor? " echoed the old gentleman. " Is that the fashionable name? "

" Yes, we never say attorney at the West End, always solicitor. But as I was going to remark," continued Lord Harold, " don't for Heaven's sake let this solicitor of yours have the looking out after an estate for you. He would only think of buying you some tract of land over which a railway is going to run, so that he may have the job of proceeding against the directors for compensation on your behalf. Besides, his taste cannot possibly be good. There would be no pineries and vineries, no hothouses and greenhouses, no artificial pieces of water upon the estate of a lawyer's choosing; and very likely he would buy you a brick-field, so that you might speculate in houses, that he might draw up the leases and sue the tenants for their rent."

"Then what would your lordship advise? " asked Mr. Gunthorpe, seeming to acknowledge all the seriousness and gravity of the young nobleman's objections.

" Why, since my revered and respected uncle the marquis has recommended you so especially to my attention," answered Lord Harold, " I feel it a duty to offer my services in this matter."

" Ah! then your lordship would undertake to find me a suitable estate? " said Mr. Gunthorpe.

" With the greatest pleasure in the world. But the wine stands with you."

" Thank you, I am getting on uncommonly well. The fact is," added Mr. Gunthorpe, " not being accustomed to English wines, or, rather, I should say, the wines you drink in England, your lordship's champagne, madeira, sherry, and port have already got up into my head."

" Oh, they won't hurt you," exclaimed Lord Harold. " So help yourself."

" Hurt you, not they! " cried Lord Saxondale. " I can get as drunk as an owl on good wine, and never feel the effects next day. It's only bad wine that plays the very devil with me."

" Your experience is doubtless great," said Mr. Gunthorpe. " How old is your lordship? Thirty or five and thirty? "

" Thirty be hanged! " ejaculated Saxondale. " I am only nineteen and a few months, but I have seen a little of life, though, have I not, Staunton? And it's this experience that perhaps makes me look older than I really am."

" Very likely," said Mr. Gunthorpe, as he helped himself and passed the decanter. " But as your lordship," he continued, again addressing himself to Harold, " was so kind as to offer me your advice and assistance in settling myself down, perhaps you will sketch out some little plan that you would have me adopt? If I do not follow the whole details, yet some of them may at least prove valuable suggestions."

" First, let me ask your exact position, my dear Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lord Harold, flinging a significant look across the table at Saxondale, as much as to imply that they were getting the old gentleman into the right line to make him useful. " You are very rich of course? That we can pretty well guess. But are you married, any children? "

" I am a widower, and all my children are grown up and provided for," returned Mr. Gunthorpe, " so I have only to think of myself."

" Good! " observed Lord Harold. " In the first place, then, you must leave that insufferable place, the Bell and Crown, the very name of which raises up odours of pea-soup and boiled beef — "

" I can assure you it is a most excellent hotel," interrupted

Mr. Gunthorpe, " and I had serious intentions of asking you and Lord Saxondale to dine with me to-morrow. Their bitter beer is excellent."

" We never touch malt," answered Lord Harold, " nor must you, Mr. Gunthorpe, in future, for we mean to launch you out into fashionable life. So you must leave this Bell and Crown, and come up for the present to some first-rate West End hotel."

" But it must be in a line of omnibuses to the City," observed Mr. Gunthorpe.

" Oh, fie! omnibuses indeed! " exclaimed Lord Harold. " You must have a drag of your own."

" Leave me to find our friend a suitable trap," observed Saxondale.

" Drag, trap? " repeated Mr. Gunthorpe, looking bewildered. " Those words sound very vulgar indeed to my ears."

" Perfectly fashionable and correct, I can assure you," rejoined Lord Harold. " Well, then, we are agreed so far that you come up to the West End, establish yourself at an hotel, and set up your drag. Then you must have a tiger — "

" God forbid! " ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, turning pale. " I have an abhorrence for wild beasts. But why not a boa-constrictor at once? "

" You don't understand," replied Lord Harold. " We mean an elegant little livery servant. And then you must have your valet and your groom. These will do in the shape of slaveys for the present. Then as to horses, leave me and Saxondale to procure them for you; we know the sort of thing you require. But this is not quite all. You must have your box at the opera; and, by rights, in order to be quite fashionable, —but I don't do more than just hint at it, — you ought to have — "

" What? " asked Mr. Gunthorpe.

" Your mistress," was the response.

" Will you undertake to find that also? " inquired the old gentleman, refilling his glass, and seeming to sway a little to and fro in his chair, as if the wine had indeed got up into his head.

" Oh, certainly. We will find you everything, and while you are making a perfect round of pleasure at the West

End, we will be looking out for an estate with a splendid mansion upon it, beautiful grounds, a deer-park, and everything proper. We must also have you presented at court; and I don't know, but I dare say it can be contrived," added Lord Harold, with a mysterious air and knowing look, " to get you a baronetcy."

" Ah, indeed!" cried Mr. Gunthorpe. " Well, I don't know but that I should like a handle to my name. How my poor father and mother, the cobbler and charwoman, would stare if they could only get up out of their graves in Clerkenwell churchyard and see their son a baronet!"

" I am sure you deserve a baronetcy," said Lord Harold, with a slight grimace at that reference to his guest's parentage, " for having made so fine a fortune. How much did you tell us just now? "

" I don't think that I mentioned the amount," responded Mr. Gunthorpe, now beginning to hiccup, " but when I went into the whole affair with Snuff— my attor— solicitor, I mean, we found it a little above half a million."

" Well, that's not bad," said Lord Harold, sipping his wine coolly, as if he were quite accustomed to contemplate such fortunes. " But what is your Christian name? "

" Jonathan," answered the old gentleman, with a somewhat vacant stare.

" Sir Jonathan Gunthorpe," observed Harold. " Excellent! It would look well enough in the ' Court Guide.' Edmund, you must introduce our very intimate and particular friend Gunthorpe to Lady Saxondale and your sisters."

" Oh, Lady Saxondale will be delighted to see him," exclaimed Edmund; and as he spoke he could not help smiling at the idea of presenting that queer-looking figure to his haughty and brilliant mother, — with whom, by the bye, he was on no terms to present anybody at all.

" I am sure your lordships," said Mr. Gunthorpe, " are uncommon kind, and if in return I can do you any little service, I shall be glad."

He spoke these words with much apparent difficulty, swaying from side to side on his chair, hiccupping, and surveying first one of the young noblemen and then the other, with the dull and vacant gaze of complete inebriety.

" Well, I hope that this friendship, which has begun so

pleasantly," observed Lord Harold, "will continue for ever. But when I look at you, Mr. Gunthorpe, I really think you might marry again. A hale, active, intelligent, good-looking gentleman like yourself — "

"But I am sixty," said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Pooh, nonsense! you make a mistake. You can't be more than forty-five."

"Well, perhaps I am not," observed the old gentleman, looking uncommonly bewildered and owlish. "My father and mother must have deceived me, and I will go and consult the parish registers to-morrow. But about this marriage? In addition to all the other things you are going to find me, can you manage a suitable wife? "

"I have no doubt of it," replied Harold. "I have already got a dowager countess in my eye for you, and if she won't do, then there's a splendid baroness with eight thousand a year."

"Oh, between the two I am pretty sure to be suited," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, refilling his glass again, while Harold looked across the table to Saxondale with a glance that implied what a precious old fool their companion was.

"And what fun we will have at the wedding!" cried Edmund.

"But again I say that you overwhelm me with obligations," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, appearing to speak with more and more difficulty, and to be troubled with more frequent hiccups.

"Well," said Lord Harold, assuming quite a careless, indifferent tone, and speaking in an offhand manner, "it does so happen just at the present crisis that I am pressed for five thousand. In fact, I have overdrawn my bankers, and if you would accommodate me for six weeks or a couple of months — "

"Oh, certainly," replied Mr. Gunthorpe, "with the greatest pleasure in the world. Five thousand is a poor loan to advance to one who is going to assist me in buying estates, horses, carriages, and so on, and who is first to provide me with a mistress and then with a wife. Give me pen and ink."

Mr. Gunthorpe had made this speech in a somewhat more fluent and collected manner than he had been talking for the last hour, and, indeed, both Harold and Edmund were

for a moment seized with a little uneasiness as they thought they observed a vein of sarcasm running through his words. But as his looks corroborated not this suspicion, they grew perfectly satisfied again, and rapidly exchanged glances of delight as the old gentleman asked for the ink. Writing materials were speedily supplied, and Mr. Gunthorpe, diving his hand deep down into one of his capacious pockets, drew forth a cheque-book, which to the two noblemen was mighty pleasant to behold. Laying it open upon the table before him, Mr. Gunthorpe proceeded to fill up one of the draughts, but it seemed that he had no small difficulty in steadying his hand to write, while his head kept bobbing down, as if his wig would bob off also into a dish of strawberries just before him. However, he succeeded in writing the cheque for five thousand pounds; and then, tearing out the leaf, handed it to Lord Harold, who, folding it negligently up, thrust it with true aristocratic listlessness into his waistcoat pocket.

" By the bye," he said, " I will just give you my note of hand for this."

" Don't trouble yourself. I dare say it will be all the same in the end," answered Mr. Gunthorpe.

" Well, I will give it to you next time we meet. And now I suppose you mean to make a night of it with us? What shall we do? It's just ten o'clock," added Lord Harold, looking at his watch. " Shall we go and lounge into some hell? "

" Don't you think it's better to wait till you are compelled to go there? " asked Mr. Gunthorpe, apparently with amazing innocence.

" I mean the gaming-house," rejoined Harold. " Not that I should propose to you to play, Mr. Gunthorpe. Oh, no, not for the world. But it struck me that if you would like to see a little of London life — "

" I don't think it was exactly for that purpose your uncle gave me letters of introduction to you. Besides, this wine has got into my head; and so, if you will be good enough to send and order me a cab, I will take my leave."

" Well, if you insist, I won't detain you," said Lord Harold Staunton, ringing the bell; for the truth was that now he had got as much as he required out of the old gentleman, at least for the present, he did not care how soon the said

old gentleman took his departure. "But I say," he observed, as a thought struck him, when he had issued instructions to the footman who answered his summons, relative to the cab, "if you happen to be writing to my uncle, you won't let him know anything that we have been saying or doing this evening?"

"Why, is there any harm in it?" asked Mr. Gunthorpe, rising from his seat and tottering somewhat.

"Oh, no, no harm," replied Harold, "only it's just as well to avoid touching upon such matters. You see, the marquis is a precious eccentric old fool, and might put a very different construction on things from what they really ought to bear."

"So he might, so he might," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Therefore, if your lordship wishes it, I certainly will not mention anything at all upon the subject when I write to the Marquis of Eagledean."

"That will be best," rejoined Staunton.

The footman now reappeared, but as he could not possibly bring himself to mention the vulgar name of cab, he, with much delicate forethought for the aristocratic feelings of his master and Lord Saxondale, announced that "the conveyance was at the door."

"Well, good evening, my lords," said Mr. Gunthorpe, shaking them both with such violence by the hand that they very nearly cried out. "I am much indebted to you for your hospitality. It is an evening which I shall not forget in a hurry, and I hope that time will show how I can appreciate your conduct."

"Good night, old fellow," said Lord Saxondale. "You are a regular trump, after all."

"It makes me proud to think that I have your lordship's good opinion," answered the retired banker, with a low bow.

"Now, when are we to meet again," asked Lord Harold, "to begin putting into force the various things we have been talking about?"

"I will write to your lordship to-morrow, from the Bell and Crown," answered Mr. Gunthorpe; and he thereupon took his leave, walking out of the room a trifle more steadily than the young noblemen thought he would be enabled to do.

And then this same mean old gentleman, who had quarrelled with the cabman for his fare and insisted upon having

twopence change, dropped a guinea into the hand of the tall, stiff footman who held the front door open; so that the flunky became all in a moment as obsequiously polite as possible, handed Mr. Gunthorpe into the vehicle, and having ascertained the place of destination, felt himself by no means shocked at having to bawl out, "All right, cabman, Bell and Crown, Holborn!"

Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale knew not exactly what to think of their friend Mr. Gunthorpe. The five-thousand-pound cheque seemed certainly an evidence that he was by no means the keen, cautious, and sharp-witted individual they had at first expected, but on the other hand, there appeared to have been a slightly perceptible undercurrent of sarcasm in many of the observations he had made. However, the two young aristocrats came to the conclusion that, though sharp in one sense, he was "green" enough in others, and that he was most anxious to become introduced to the sphere of fashion.

On the following morning, long before Lord Harold had risen, a letter was delivered at his lodgings, and when he perused it, he found the contents to run thus:

"Bell and Crown, Holborn.

"My dear Lord Harold: — Having maturely reflected upon your various kind propositions of last night, I feel myself so utterly unworthy of such an overwhelming mass of bounties that I am compelled to decline them. I know that I am but a vulgar citizen, and consequently but little fitted for the perfumed atmosphere of your aristocracy. I think that Mr. Snuffley's idea of an estate will come up to the standard of my ambition, and until I succeed in procuring one, I feel too comfortable at the Bell and Crown to render it necessary to change my quarters to a West End hotel. As for a drag or trap, I am of opinion that a coach-builder in Long Acre may be safely entrusted with the order, and until it is completed I shall doubtless find the omnibuses commodious enough for my purposes. In respect to horses, the hostler of the Bell and Crown is an excellent judge, and will put me in the way of getting what I want. Relative to an opera box, I am not formed to shine in one, and being conscious of my own defects, do not wish to make myself ridiculous. As for a mistress, with which fashionable appur-

tenance your lordship so generously offered to supply me, I do not wish to deprive you of your own, nor yet have to support one for the benefit of my noble friends. With regard to presentation at court, I am too much occupied with Snuffley for the present to think of kicking my heels at St. James's. The baronetcy, which your lordship volunteered to obtain for me, will be quite in time when I reach the rank of lord mayor of London, or something of that sort. Lastly, in respect to a wife, I should be truly sorry to deprive your lordship of the chance of obtaining the fair hand of the dowager countess, or hooking the splendid baroness with eight thousand pounds a year.

"I remain, my dear Lord Harold,

"Your most obliged and obedient servant,

"JONATHAN GUNTHORPE."

Lord Harold Staunton was at first inclined to be angry on reading this letter, but as he glanced over it a second time, he could not help bursting out into a laugh, which had scarcely subsided when his friend Lord Saxondale made his appearance.

"Well, after all," exclaimed Harold, "the old fellow saw through us completely. Here, read this letter. The sarcasm that marks it is beyond mistake."

"But why on earth did he lend you the money?" cried Saxondale, when he had perused the letter which his friend handed to him.

"Oh, I suppose merely through purse-proud vanity," was the response. "But, after all, it is perhaps just as well that we should be quit of him, for it would have been a horrid bore to introduce such a comical old blade as that to our friends. So let us think only of enjoying ourselves with his money, and leave him in peace to his boiled beef and bitter ale at the Bell and Crown."

CHAPTER IX

ANGELA VIVALDI

It was Saturday night again, and the opera was once more crowded to excess. Bright and joyous was that scene, presenting a wondrous contrast to the care-fraught world without, where the turmoil of jarring interests never ceases and the struggle of conflicting passions is never at rest.

And yet, when surveying that immense amphitheatre, thronged with the highest in rank, the proudest in title, the richest in wealth, the most elegant in attire, and the loveliest in personal charms, must not the thinking observer ask himself whether, if his eye could penetrate beneath that brilliant surface and read deep down to the innermost recesses of the heart, he would find bliss, contentment, and joy in every soul? Alas, no! In those festooned alcoves many a smiling lip and radiant brow served but as a mask to conceal cares the most poignant, anxieties the most intense, jealousies the most fierce, envies the most torturing. Where flowers were upon the brow and diamonds upon the hair, the brain might throb beneath; and within those bosoms that were decked with costliest jewels might the darkest and ignoblest passions be raging. Nor less did looks of seeming kindness that were exchanged and honeyed words of greeting that passed between acquaintances and friends serve to conceal most bitter, rancorous, and implacable hostilities. Amongst those beings who appeared the fairest and gentlest were some whose bosoms burned with the devouring fires of insatiable passion; amongst the most envied and the most worshipped were some whose unrequited love or betrayed affections had already made a ruin and a desert of their hearts. There, too, amidst the galaxy of splendour, rank, and fashion were the vain repinings of beauty on the

wane, concealed beneath flashing gems, the artifice of cosmetics, and studied smiles. Oh, if the polished surface of that bright and joyous scene were dazzling and thrilling and overpowering to contemplate, yet were the veil which shrouded the secret thoughts drawn aside and the interior of every heart exposed, the eye would perhaps have recoiled in amazement and in horror from the chaos of feelings and pandemonium of passions thus revealed to the gaze. Might it not then be said that the stage-lights served but to separate two sets of actors, the audience and the performers?

As on the former occasion when we introduced our readers to the opera, Lady Florina and some female friends were there, accompanied by Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale. In the pit, occupying one of the foremost seats just behind the orchestra, was William Deveril, the young professor of drawing and painting whose name has been before mentioned. In the royal box Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Kent were seated; behind them stood several lords and ladies in waiting, those obsequious hangers-on of royalty who are more contemptible in their grovelling sycophancy than the most servile toad-eaters and lick-spittles are in a less elevated sphere of life. In a neighbouring box to the royal one was a German prince, the reigning duke of some nameless state consisting of a few beggarly acres, and who was attended by some very queer-looking persons, whom the newspapers next day represented as "a brilliant suite." Indeed, this illustrious prince had paid the present visit to England attended by the principal officers of his court and the staff of his army, his coachman being at the same time field-marshal and commander-in-chief, his valet the prime minister of the duchy, his head cook the lord chamberlain, and his butler the master of the horse. All these high functionaries of state were dressed in splendid uniforms, and their most serene and illustrious master was covered with stars, orders, and decorations. It was a very brilliant suite indeed.

We have already said that the house was thronged to suffocation; we may add that it was crowded as it had never been before. When the doors were first thrown open and the crush took place, the German prince had got his head so jammed against a pillar that if it had not been of a thickness truly enviable on such an occasion it would have been

squeezed as flat as a pancake. Immense was the injury done to white waistcoats, neckties, and other articles of apparel, feet were trodden into jellies, and one or two elderly gentlemen lost their wigs in the crowd. But despite these and other similar misadventures, the throng had kept pouring on until the whole house was filled, as above stated.

We do not intend to speak of the opera that was performed on the occasion, or to notice the enchantments of the singing or the music. Our object is to introduce to the reader the cynosure of the evening's attraction, the inimitable and charming Angela Vivaldi. To say that she was beautiful, were to say nothing; she was lovely almost beyond all power of description, fairer than the fairest image which painter ever drew, sculptor ever modelled, or poet ever dreamed. Her age was about eighteen, and without exception she was the most ravishing embodiment of female charms that ever burst upon the delighted vision. When she appeared upon the stage, enthusiastic was the reception she experienced; and whatever cares or torturing feelings or malignant passions that might have before been agitating in even the unhappiest hearts and most racked of souls were temporarily forgotten now, in the contemplation of that divine creature.

Her countenance was of the most illuminating beauty. The high-arched brows, the straight, chiseled nose, the small ripe mouth, the rounded chin, and the oval outline of the face, were all of classic faultlessness. Her eyes, large and dark, were full of fire, and yet had nothing bold in their expression; but bright as her glances were, there was still a sweetness in them that bespoke a purity and an innocence of soul, so that her looks warmed the feelings without inflaming them. Her shining dark hair clustered about her well-shaped head, and shone with a natural glory of its own brighter than the blaze of light which flooded the whole scene. Her complexion was dazzlingly pure and transparent, and the mantling colour upon her cheeks derived not its carnation hue from the effect of art, but was the rich vermeil bloom shed there by nature's own hand. The swanlike neck sloped off to shoulders just rounded sufficiently for plumpness, and expanded into a bosom full enough for feminine beauty, without marring the statuesque perfection of the entire bust. She was tall, and though slender, not

thin; for, while replete with bayadere elasticity and willowy litheness, her figure still seemed filled out to all its just proportions. Thus aerial grace was blended with a sculptural richness of contours, sylphid elegance was united with a rounded fulness of charms. Had she been bred in some far-off western forest, like a fawn, she could not have been of more unconscious elasticity of carriage nor of more unstudied gracefulness of mien. Upright as a dart, the suppleness of her form and elegant freedom of her gait would have shown her at once, though robed in flowing drapery, to be a creature of perfect make. But now her short raiment, reaching only to her knees, revealed the sweeping length, the straightness, and the beautiful symmetry of the limbs. Nature had given her an instep finely arched, and this, united to an exquisite foot and a delicate ankle, completed that air of high-bred gracefulness which may be observed in the figure of a woman as well as in an Arabian courser.

But all that we have as yet said of Angela Vivaldi can convey to the mind of the reader but a faint idea of her ravishing charms. Let us behold her now, as she moves in the bewitching dance. Here again the power of language altogether fails us, either to depict the winning graces of her style, the beauty of her attitudes, or the sylphlike delicacy of her movements. It was the poetry of motion expressed and personified in a being of beauty to embellish it and of soul to comprehend it. Now, as her shining dark hair clustered over her high and polished brow, she shook it away with the sweetest and most innocently coquettish toss of the head imaginable; then, as she appeared to warm alike to the excitement of the dance, the influence of the music, and the rapturous applause which incessantly burst forth from the crowded house, a beaming smile appeared upon her budding lips, suggesting the idea of a young love cradled in a just opening rose.

And looked she not the queen of love herself, come down upon that earth which she scarcely seemed to press with her aerial feet, — treading indeed so lightly that, still likening her to Venus, she seemed to stand on the froth of a fresh-broken wave? The spectacle was delicious. Every muscle and limb of the enchanting creature appeared to be in harmonious motion. Blooming with youth and shining with divinity, she resembled the Medicean statue wakened by

the Pygmalion inspiration of love into the full glow of voluptuous yet ethereal existence. To gaze upon her, invested as she was with the most ravishing charms, to behold her starry eyes sparkling more bright than the diamonds on any high-born maiden's brow, to mark the graceful curves and dreamy waving of her arms, to follow the easy undulations of her sylphid shape, the gentle bendings of her head and neck, the movements of her graceful limbs, and the play of her exquisite feet, it would seem as if all the goddesses and graces had lent their brightest charms and most ravishing fascinations to concentrate all their power in that one being who thus moved in loveliness and glory before thousands of enraptured eyes.

Amongst that almost countless throng of spectators, many and varied were the feelings with which the beautiful *danseuse* was contemplated. There was, however, one prevailing sentiment of ravished admiration on the part of all, and likewise one universal feeling as to the beauty of Angela Vivaldi. An angel in name, she seemed an angel in form likewise, — a truth which not even envy or jealousy dared hesitate to acknowledge. But apart from those common feelings of admiration for the exquisite dancer's art and of the woman's perfect beauty, there were individual sentiments which in a few instances we must pause to define. Lord Harold Staunton, for example, was more perfectly smitten on the present occasion with Angela Vivaldi's personal charms than he was on the first night of her appearance, and he regretted having encouraged his friend Saxondale to think of winning her for himself. As for this young nobleman, the conceited and unprincipled Edmund, he had not even the good taste to conceal in the presence of Florina the ardent passion with which the lovely dancer inspired him. Elsewhere, in another box, was some old marquis, rolling in riches, but with one foot in the grave, who was revolving in his mind whether it should be fifty or a hundred thousand pounds that the very next morning he would send to offer this Signora Vivaldi as a proof of his admiration, a symbol of his hope, and an earnest of his liberality; while in an adjacent box was a middle-aged duke, likewise settling plans to win the favour of the charming Angela. Farther on still was another of England's titled peers, a widower and immensely rich, who had already made up his mind to offer

his hand in marriage to Signora Vivaldi, and thus, as he flattered himself, with one bold stroke carry off the prize in the presence of all competitors. Even the German prince had his cogitations upon a similar subject, and whispered to his head cook, or, rather, lord chamberlain, that he had serious intentions of taking the *danseuse* as his morganatic spouse.

But there was one individual present who seemed animated with far different feelings from all that we have yet described as he gazed upon Angela Vivaldi. This individual was William Deveril. It was not with the devouring eagerness of passion, nor with the wonder of admiration, nor with the hope of conquest, nor with aught akin to an impure feeling, that he followed the bewitching girl in all her sylphid movements; but it was with a beaming satisfaction upon his countenance, as if he experienced the purest and kindest sympathy in those feelings of triumph which glowed in her own bosom. There was still one other person in the house that night who seemed to take no ordinary interest in the performance and success of Angela Vivaldi, and this was Mr. Gunthorpe. Like Deveril, however, the old gentleman surveyed not her beauties with gloating looks, nor did he devour her charms through the medium of an opera-glass; but seated at some distance from the stage, and in the humblest part of the house, he contemplated her with a sort of benevolent satisfaction, as if it did his heart good to witness the triumph of a young creature whose virtue was reported to be as pure as her beauty was ravishing.

At length the performance was over, and Angela Vivaldi received the floral crowns which aristocratic hands threw upon the stage. Handkerchiefs waved, the house rang again and again with plaudits, the enthusiasm was immense. When she retired, it seemed as if the source of all the lustre which flooded the vast building had disappeared from the view, although that dazzling light itself still remained. Then, as the throng began to pour forth from the house, several of those hoary profligates and titled aspirants who had conceived designs relative to Angela Vivandi endeavoured to avail themselves of the license, previously enjoyed by them, of passing behind the scenes. But they experienced a peremptory refusal. In vain did they remonstrate; they were told that on the first night of the signora's appear-

ance several persons had been thus admitted to that privileged region, but that their presence was distasteful to the fair *danseuse*, and she had stipulated against a repetition of what she had regarded as an annoyance. One or two noblemen threatened and blustered, but the stage authorities were inexorable, and the claimants for admission behind the scenes were compelled to retire in dudgeon and mortification.

Outside the theatre, however, the astute Alfred, Lord Harold Staunton's valet, was keeping watch. Handsomely dressed, and without appearing to have any particular object in view, he was smoking his cigar in the most finished style of indolent dandyism, so that no one could have fancied that he was any other than one of the rakish loungers who infest the opera colonnades from seven in the evening until past midnight. Pacing thus leisurely to and fro in the neighbourhood of the stage door, he presently beheld some of the minor performers and ballet-girls issuing forth, either singly or in twos and threes, and looking very different indeed in their own habitual garb from what they were when bedecked in their stage costumes. Anon, some underling rushed out to order a cab, into which one of the superior performers or better paid actresses stepped, and away the vehicle rolled. A few minutes passed, and then a private carriage being summoned to the stage door, Grisi, the queen of song, was handed forth by some male companion, with whom she took her departure in the splendid equipage. Then several more street cabs were called into requisition by the dispersing *artistes;* another private carriage or two likewise drew up, received their well-paid owners, and dashed away again.

All this time Alfred was lounging about with as much seeming listlessness as heretofore, but in reality keeping a keen watch upon every female who issued from the stage door, in the expectation of recognizing the charming countenance of Signora Vivaldi. But when a long interval had elapsed and she did not make her appearance, he began to think she must have taken her departure by some other means of egress from the theatre. Still, however, he resolved to watch the stage door until it closed; and presently a neat little equipage was summoned from the adjacent street leading out of the Haymarket, by the theatrical underling before alluded to. This equipage consisted of a light and

unpretending carriage of the kind which has taken its name from Lord Brougham; it was drawn by one horse, and was driven by a coachman neatly dressed in plain clothes. The stage underling opened the door of this vehicle, and in a few minutes a lady passed rapidly out of the theatre, with an ample cloak flung negligently over her shoulders. She had on a simple straw bonnet, and a veil was drawn over her countenance. She was attended by a middle-aged gentleman, whom Alfred knew to be connected with the management of the opera, and who was now exhibiting a most respectful attention toward this lady. The valet could not obtain a satisfactory view of her countenance through the dark veil, but from the partial glimpse which he did gain, he felt assured that she was none other than the one for whom he was watching. Besides, her height, the graceful ease and elegant dignity of her walk, and her entire appearance, so far as he could judge of it, muffled up as she was, left no doubt in his mind that the fair one was Signora Vivaldi.

The gentleman who had escorted her to her carriage assisted her to enter, closed the door himself, paused for a minute to say a few words to her at the window, then shook hands with her, and stopped for an instant on the curbstone of the colonnade to gaze after the little equipage as it drove rapidly off. Alfred hastened up to a street cab, leaped on the box by the side of the driver, and bade him follow the vehicle which had just rolled away from the stage entrance.

The neat little equipage, followed by the cab, passed up the Haymarket, then threaded the Quadrant, proceeded up Regent Street, continued its way along Portland Place, and entered the Regent's Park. Alfred thought to himself that the fair *danseuse* probably lived in this salubrious quarter of London; but he was deceived, for the little equipage still continued rolling on, turning out of the Regent's Park into Camden Town, across which it cut toward Brecknock Hill, which at that time, though now pretty nearly covered with buildings, had scarcely a house upon it. Up the ascent of the hill the brougham went at a good pace, the cab still following; and Alfred thought that if the pursuit were to last much longer, the coachman's suspicions could not fail to be excited. Indeed, it seemed as if something of this kind were

already the case, for on reaching the brow of the hill he drove down the ascent on the other side at a rattling pace, already beginning to distance the very inferior animal which was dragging the street cab. The night, however, being very beautiful and clear, Alfred and the cabman had no difficulty in keeping in sight the equipage which they were pursuing, and which was now entering the district of Holloway.

"We must not lose it, after all this trouble," said Alfred to the cabman. "Spare not the whip upon that miserable hack of yours. Your reward shall be in proportion to the success that I experience."

The cabman whipped his horse, and it regained some of its lost ground as the neat little equipage in front, crossing the broad road of Holloway, clashed into what was then a beautiful lane with a green hedge on each side, and which bore, as it indeed still bears, the name of the Seven Sisters Road. Ultimately the equipage stopped at a little villa some distance up this road, and standing in a somewhat lonely situation. Alfred made the cabman drive past, so as to create the impression that his destination lay farther on, and he beheld the lady emerge from the brougham and enter the villa. Having caused the cabman to drive on as far as he thought it necessary for the sake of appearances, the valet bade him turn back, and at a late hour, or, rather, an early one in the morning, he reached his master's lodgings in Jermyn Street.

Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale were sitting up, drinking punch and smoking cigars, in expectation of the valet's return, and the moment Alfred made his appearance in the room, they saw by his countenance that he had been successful. He at once gave the two young noblemen an account of his proceedings, and they applauded the perseverance and skill which he had exhibited in tracing the fair one to her suburban abode.

"But now, my dear Harold," said Lord Saxondale, when the valet had retired, "we have not yet settled who is to avail himself of the information just obtained. You say that you are considerably smitten with the signora, and that her brilliant appearance this night has made a much deeper impression on you than it did on the first occasion. On the other hand, I am equally mad in love with her, — no disparagement to Florina, — for you know, of course,

that when I say love, it is a very different sort of thing from what one feels for the young lady one is going to marry."

" Well, well, you need not sermonize upon it, Edmund," said Lord Harold. " We don't want to be rivals in this business, and our pretensions are equally great; that is to say, it is nothing but pretension altogether on either side. So the fairest thing will be to toss up who is to avail himself of the information Alfred has brought us."

" By all means! " cried Lord Saxondale, delighted with the course proposed, which he thought had something manly and of a sportsman-like character about it. Then taking a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket, he tossed it up in the air, crying, " Heads or tails? "

" Heads," exclaimed Lord Harold.

" 'Tis tails! " actually shrieked forth Saxondale, with childish delight.

" It is for you, then," rejoined Lord Harold, with a slight accent of pique and vexation, " to do the best you can in this matter." But instantly recovering his good-humour, he refilled his glass and said, " Here's success to your love-suit with Signora Vivaldi! "

CHAPTER X

THE COTTAGE

THE next day Lord Saxondale did not go near his friend Lord Harold Staunton, but he sent a brief note of excuse, stating that he meant to devote himself to the new enterprise which he had in hand. Having taken his breakfast in his own room, so as to avoid encountering his mother, with whom he did not wish at the present time to have any fresh "scene," he remained secluded there all the morning to deliberate upon the course he should adopt in order to obtain admission to the presence of the fair Angela Vivaldi. From what he had heard concerning her, he saw that it would be useless to write her a note beseeching her to grant him an interview, for during the week which had elapsed since he first discussed the subject with Lord Harold, he had learned from several quarters sufficient to convince him that it was not by any of the usual means of gallantry that the beautiful *danseuse* was to be won. It may be remembered that he had originally thought of addressing a note to Angela Vivaldi at the opera itself, but Harold had assured him then that if he did so his missive would only be treated with contempt. He had since ascertained that such had been the fate experienced by several other aspirants in the same quarter, and who had adopted those vulgar means of imparting their hope and their proposals to the object of their passion. Saxondale therefore saw that some other plan must be chalked out, and that the whole affair must be managed with the utmost delicacy and caution.

But how was it that, after all the reports he had heard relative to Angela's virtue, he could possibly be vain and arrogant enough to expect that he himself was the fortunate being whose aspirations were to be crowned with success?

It was for the very reason of his being thus vain and arrogant, that he entertained such a hope. Conceited to a degree, he had the highest opinion of himself, and would not believe the truth which the mirror told him, that he was very far from good-looking. On the contrary, he flattered himself that he possessed every qualification for becoming a perfect lady-killer, that wherever he chose to smile, hearts must be won, and that it was impossible for any female to resist his powers of fascination. In addition to the high opinion which he entertained relative to himself, he had a very mean one of feminine virtue in general; and we have already seen that in his first conversation with Lord Harold respecting Angela, he flippantly ignored the possibility of chastity in connection with any female figuring upon the stage. From his earliest infancy, also, he had been so fawned upon, " my lorded," toadied, and flattered that he really believed there was something talismanic in the name of Saxondale, and that the brilliancy of his rank, the immensity of the fortune which would soon be at his entire disposal, the splendour attached to his long line of ancestry, and his own personal qualifications, would prove altogether overpowering if he had but an opportunity of playing off the whole artillery of these attractions upon the young *danseuse.*

But what plan was he to pursue in order to obtain access to her? He had decided upon not writing to solicit an interview, and he reasoned that it would be equally useless to present himself at her suburban villa and send in his card, with the hope of being admitted to her presence. He thought that, in the first instance, he had better reconnoitre her abode, and endeavour, if possible, to scrape acquaintance with her lady's-maid, or any one of her domestics who might furnish him with hints for prosecuting his scheme; he might also ascertain if she walked out at all in the neighbourhood during the day, and if she did go out alone for a ramble, he might trust to the chapter of accidents to furnish means for an introduction to her. But then, on the other hand, he reasoned that if a well-dressed, elegant, and aristocratic-looking young gentleman (as he flattered himself to be) were seen lounging and loitering about the fair one's villa, her suspicions would be excited, she would be placed upon her guard, and his projects might be defeated. How, then, was he to proceed? Suddenly an idea struck him.

What if he were to disguise himself in a far humbler apparel than he was wont to wear, and thus pursue his inquiries and researches in the neighbourhood of her abode? The thought delighted him, there was something in the adventure which tickled his fancy, and he fell into a train of reflections perfectly consistent with his miserable narrow-mindedness, frivolity, and self-conceit.

" If I assume a humble garb, and throw myself in her way, she cannot fail to see that there is a certain air of distinction beneath the rough apparel, and she may become interested in me. If I bow to her with the greatest respect and seem to treat her with the utmost deference, she will be pleased, and so I shall succeed in attracting her attention. This little pantomime may last for two or three days, at the end of which she will perhaps speak to me, and so we may form an acquaintance. Then, for another two or three days I can go on thus enchaining her interest more and more, till at last, when opportunity serves, I can throw off the mask, announce my lordly rank, proclaim my noble name, and overcome her with the intelligence that it is the head of the house of Saxondale who for her sake put on a humble garb in order to throw himself in her way. She cannot help falling desperately in love with me, and whatever virtue she may possess will be thawed by so much apparent devotion on my part."

Mightily pleased with the scheme he had thus resolved upon, and the dramatic results to which he had made up his mind it was to lead, Edmund lost no time in putting his most sapient project into execution. It was rather late in the afternoon when he had finally digested all his plan of proceedings, and being Sunday, he did not exactly know where to obtain such a dress as he required. But it struck him that there would be no harm in proceeding at once in his wonted apparel to the neighbourhood of the villa, in order to reconnoitre it from a distance. He need not approach near enough to the windows to be noticed in such a way as to endanger future recognition, and, at the same time, something might be gained and the first step taken by ascertaining the exact whereabouts of the beautiful creature's abode. He accordingly sallied forth, and not choosing to afford any of the domestics the slightest clue as to his proceedings, he did not order either horse or carriage to be prepared for his use on

the occasion. Taking a cab from the nearest stand, — in spite of his denunciation of street-vehicles in the presence of Mr. Gunthorpe, — Lord Saxondale directed himself to be driven to the Seven Sisters Road, and in about three-quarters of an hour he was set down at the place of destination.

Dismissing the cabman, he walked up the road till he came within sight of the villa which Lord Harold Staunton's valet had described. It was a pretty little cottage-residence, very recently built, and standing about thirty yards back from the road, the intermediate space being occupied by a flower-garden. It had also a garden in the rear of larger extent, and had coach-house and stables attached to the building itself. Several branching evergreens, tastefully arranged, formed a just sufficient screen to prevent passers-by from being able to peer into the ground floor rooms; and altogether it was a picturesque little dwelling, isolated enough to be quite in the country, and yet not too far from the houses in the Hornsey Road to be altogether lonely.

Having made these observations from a short distance, Lord Saxondale struck into the adjacent fields, so as to ascend a gentle eminence, the same on which Hornsey Wood Tavern is situated, and whence he might contemplate at his ease the abode of his charmer. But as he was proceeding thither, he observed a cottage at a little distance, and it occurred to him that he would proceed thither to make some few inquiries relative to the signora, such as how long she had lived at the villa, how many servants she kept, and such other matters as he was interested in knowing.

The cottage stood completely away from all the other habitations thinly scattered about in that neighbourhood. It was old, dilapidated, and poverty-stricken, standing in the midst of a little garden showing but small signs of culture, and surrounded by a low fence broken in many places. On reaching the door, Edmund knocked, and ere the summons was answered he observed that the dingy blind was partly drawn back from the little window, and some one looked through the dirty panes for an instant. But almost immediately afterward the door was opened by a woman of not very prepossessing appearance.

She was of middle stature, and seemed about forty-five years of age. Her hair had evidently once been of jetty

blackness, but it was now turning with gray. Her features were strongly masculine in their outline, harsh and coarse; her dark eyes shone with an exceeding brightness; and her brows, which were very thick, met above the nose. Her look was alike bold and repulsive, and the lines upon her countenance seemed rather to have been traced by strong passions than to be the wrinkling effects of time. Her apparel was of a humble and sordid description; she had a dirty white cap on her head, and her appearance altogether was negligent and slovenly.

On opening the door the woman said nothing, but seemed to wait until the visitor should explain the object of his presence there. But she gazed upon him with mingled astonishment and curiosity, evidently wondering that so well-dressed a young gentleman should have called at her abode. Saxondale himself knew not exactly what to say, for previous to knocking at the door he had prepared in his mind no excuse for stopping at that wretched-looking place. However, being of an effrontery and a self-possession which with such individuals and in such cases often serve the purpose of ready wit, he said, in as civil a tone as he could assume, but still with a patronizing kind of air, "My good woman, I have been rambling about here till I am tired, and with your permission will walk in and sit down a little."

"There is Hornsey Wood Tavern over yonder," she replied, in a harsh voice, "not much more than half a mile distant, and there you can be accommodated better than you can here."

"But I am too tired to walk even that half-mile," said the young nobleman. "Besides which, I see a lot of working-class folks, all in their Sunday gear, wending their way in that direction, and I can't bear to mingle with such vulgarity."

"And yet you seek out a miserable-looking place like this?" the woman at once answered, fixing her dark eyes keenly upon Lord Saxondale. Then, as a thought seemed to strike her, inspired perhaps by something which she read upon his countenance while thus scrutinizing him, she added, "But I suppose you have some object in view, and therefore you can walk in."

Thus speaking, she threw the door wide open, and stood aside for the young nobleman to enter the habitation. It

consisted of two rooms on the ground floor, divided by a little passage, and the same number of rooms above, which were reached by what might by courtesy be termed a flight of stairs but was in reality only a dilapidated ladder. The room into which the woman conducted her visitor was furnished in the most wretched manner, a crazy table, three or four chairs the rush bottoms of which were broken in, and some few articles of crockery upon a shelf, constituting the principal features of that part of the dwelling. A glance into the other room as he entered had shown Edmund a scanty bed upon the floor, and one or two chairs almost as useless as those in the room to which he was introduced. The woman appeared to be alone in the house; at least Lord Saxondale saw no other person in either of the two rooms on the ground floor, nor did he hear any one moving overhead.

" You see the place into which you have invited yourself," said the woman, " but such as it is, you are welcome to make it a convenience for resting in. For what other purpose you have sought the cottage, you will perhaps explain at your leisure," and once more she fixed her eyes upon him with a scrutinizing look.

" What makes you think that I have some other purpose in view? " he asked, observing how she gazed at him.

" Because a young gentleman like you," she at once answered, " does not knock at such a place as this without a motive. If you did not choose to mingle with the working-class people that you seem to despise so much, you would have lain down on the dry grass to rest yourself — "

" I see that you are a very shrewd woman indeed," interrupted Edmund, laughing, " and perhaps if I confess that I had an object in knocking at your old tumble-down hut, you will not mind giving me the information I want, — especially as here is something to oil your tongue for you."

As he thus spoke, he drew forth a well-filled purse, the contents being a portion of the proceeds of Mr. Gunthorpe's cheque, and taking out a sovereign, with true aristocratic indifference in respect to the value of the money, he tossed it into the lap of the woman who had seated herself at a little distance from him.

" Now, then, tell me what you want," she said, taking up the coin coldly and leisurely, as if it were by no means so

great a godsend as from the poverty of the place one might have supposed it to be.

"That pretty little villa which you see yonder, about three-quarters of a mile across the fields, who lives there?" asked Saxondale.

"I do not know her name. It is a young lady."

"Very beautiful, is she not?"

"Very. I have seen her once or twice, and she struck me as being very beautiful."

"But do you not know who or what she is?" asked Edmund.

"No; I have never had the curiosity to make any inquiries," replied the woman.

"Have you not lived long here? Or perhaps I should rather ask whether she has not lived long at that villa?"

"I can answer both questions. In the first place, I have lived here for many years; and, in the second place, the young lady at Evergreen Villa has only lived there a few weeks, perhaps not more than a month."

"Ah! then it is not surprising you should know nothing about her," observed Edmund. "I think I will go and make inquiries elsewhere," and he rose from his seat as he spoke.

"Stop," said the woman, "you may not be more fortunate in learning elsewhere the particulars you have sought here; but if you like, and are not in a very great hurry for a day or so, I will ascertain everything you want to know. And besides," she added, with another meaning look, "perhaps I may assist you in the design you have in contemplation."

"What design?" demanded Saxondale, sharply, afraid of trusting the woman too far or suffering her to penetrate his views too deeply.

"You must not think I am a fool," she replied, a momentary expression of contempt flitting over her harsh features. "For what earthly reason can a young gentleman like you come making inquiries about a beautiful girl, unless it is that you have an ulterior object in view? In the same way that I saw it was only pretence that made you say you were tired when you knocked at my door, so can I read the motive of your questions relative to the girl at Evergreen Villa."

"Well, at all events, there is a bluntness and frankness about you that I like," observed Edmund, who began to

think that so shrewd, penetrating, and cunning a woman as this evidently was might be made a most valuable instrument in the furtherance of his design. "To speak with equal candour, then, I must admit that I do feel a very great interest in the beautiful girl of whom we are talking, and if you will consent to serve me — "

"I have already said that I will," interrupted the woman. "Come, now, do not beat about the bush, tell me what you want. I see that you have gold with which you can repay my services, and it's very sure the young lady at Evergreen Villa will not come and bribe me to act against you."

"In the first place," rejoined Saxondale, "you must find out how many servants she keeps, whether she has a maid who, like most of her class, will accept a bribe and enter into my interests."

"That is a point which may be almost reckoned upon with the fullest confidence," observed the woman. "But go on. What other inquiries am I to make? "

"Whether the fair one goes out for a walk by herself at all, and if so, which direction she usually takes, what her habits are, whether she sees any company or lives retired — "

"In fact, you want to know everything about her," again interrupted the woman, "and to glean all such circumstances as may suggest the plans that you are to adopt. All this I understand at a glance."

"Then I am very certain that I could not have alighted upon a more able assistant," remarked Saxondale. "But I have not altogether explained myself. The truth is, I wish to throw a little spice of romance into this proceeding, for I have the outline of my plan all cut and dried, but as a matter of course the substance of it must be filled up according as circumstances may suggest."

"Now, then, for the romance part of it? " said the woman interrogatively, and again that transiently contemptuous expression deepened for a moment the lines of her harsh countenance. "Romance is pleasant enough for a fine young gentleman of your age, and perhaps for a sweet young girl such as she is at yon villa, but I question whether my matter-of-fact assistance will not in the long run prove more useful to your aims than all your romance. However, go on."

"What I require is a sort of disguise," answered Saxondale,

" the rude dress of a mechanic, not too greasy or dirty, lest it should make me sick — "

" You want gentility in the workman's garb? " interrupted the woman. " Well if you leave it to me I will procure you that dress to-morrow. I observe your height, you are not very tall, but you are nicely made."

" Yes, I flatter myself," observed Saxondale, caressing his beardless chin, " that I am not altogether amiss."

" On the contrary," said the woman, whose eagle eyes penetrated the frivolous, weak-minded young nobleman's wretched conceit and vanity at a single glance, " you are in every respect a most fit and suitable admirer for such a charming creature as the occupant of Evergreen Villa."

" But you must understand it is not marriage that I mean."

" You need not tell me that. A man who means marriage does not go beating about the bush in such a style as this. You long to possess that girl, and I do not hesitate to declare that you shall succeed."

" Ah, you promise me that? " exclaimed Saxondale, rejoiced at the tone of confidence and the air of assurance with which the woman spoke. " But really, when I look at you, I do recognize a certain superiority about you underneath that poverty-stricken garb."

" Yes, the superiority of intellect," at once replied the woman, and for a moment she drew herself up haughtily. " I was not always what I now seem. But no matter, we will not touch upon that point. Relative to your own affair, I promise that your aspirations shall be gratified shortly, and in the meantime I will not let the grass grow under my feet. This very evening will I institute the inquiries you have suggested, and such others as I deem it necessary to make, and to-morrow I will procure the mechanic's dress. You shall have everything complete."

" And do you think," asked Saxondale, " that if I took it into my head to stay a week or ten days altogether in this neighbourhood I could obtain a decent lodging near, so that I might be close at hand to avail myself at any moment of whatsoever circumstances might transpire? "

" I suppose," said the woman, " that if you mean to throw your spice of romance into this love-affair, you could content yourself with rough accommodations for a little while? Because, if so, I could make up a bed here — Ah! you need

not turn up your nose so hastily. When I go into town to-morrow to procure your mechanic's dress, I can get you clean sheets and blankets at the same time, and a new mattress, too, into the bargain."

"Well, I don't know but what it would be advisable to make preparations for a shake-down upon the floor, and you could get me some refreshments from the tavern yonder. All this will be amusing enough, and when the charming creature comes to know what I have done for her sake — "

"She will of course view you with an interest all the greater," rejoined the woman.

"Then, be the arrangements as you suggest," said Lord Saxondale. "Here is the wherewith to increase the comforts of your place and procure the things that I require. It is also an earnest of what my liberality may be if through your assistance I succeed in the accomplishment of my aims."

Thus speaking, Edmund again drew forth the well-filled purse and tossed ten sovereigns upon the table. The woman did not utter a word of acknowledgment, but deliberately gathered up the coins and dropped them into her pocket. She then asked her visitor at what hour he would return on the morrow.

"When do you think that you will have anything of consequence to tell me?" he asked. "Mind, I am very impatient in this matter, and the sooner it is put in train the better."

"I have already promised that the grass shall not grow under my feet," replied the woman. "If you come up to-morrow evening after dusk, I may perhaps have tidings of a more satisfactory nature to communicate than you are likely to dream of. At all events, I will do my best."

"Then I will be here after dusk," rejoined Saxondale, perfectly delighted at the tone of confidence in which the woman spoke and the businesslike way in which she treated the whole affair.

He then took his departure, congratulating himself upon having been led by accident to that cottage where he had found so valuable an agent to assist him in his designs. On retracing his steps toward Holloway, he kept at a prudent distance from Evergreen Villa, and taking the first cab he could find, sped homeward.

CHAPTER XI

AGAR TOWN

Every one at all acquainted with London knows King's Cross, where until very lately stood the fever hospital, behind which was the quarter we are about to describe. But ere entering upon this description, we must observe that the fever hospital has been pulled down, and at this present time the principal station of the Great Northern Railway is being built upon the spot. The railway itself, running through the district which is about to occupy our attention, has necessarily led to some innovatory improvements therein, but many of the worst features of that densely populated neighbourhood still exist just as they were in the year 1844, the date of this portion of our tale. At that time Agar Town might be described as a sort of peculiar colony or independent settlement, cut off, as it were, from the adjacent quarters.

Turning out of the King's Road close by St. Pancras Workhouse, the explorer of that region ascends a narrow rising pathway, passes by a row of wretched little huts, with little pieces of garden, the borders of which are edged with large stones, and continuing his way, is speedily in the midst of a maze of streets and alleys constituting Agar Town. A canal intersects the district, some of the houses overhang the towing paths, and the little back yards of others are walled or fenced off on the brink of the cutting through which the stream flows. From the appearance of the place it would seem as if no such things as paving-rates were known there; or if they be, it is a downright robbery to levy them in a quarter where not a bit of pavement is to be seen. Yet the unpaved thoroughfares cannot even be described as roads, for so far from being kept in order, it does not seem as if the

slightest trouble had ever been taken to level them. In dry weather it is one succession of little hillocks and holes, so that no vehicle, whether the lightest carriage or the heaviest wagon, could possibly pass along without being jolted to pieces. The impression at once made upon the mind is that of a number of the most wretched huts and hovels built upon a ploughed field, where all the heaps of earth thrown out from the shallow foundations had been left to find a level for themselves as best they could. In very rainy weather these thoroughfares are knee-deep in mud; and then the impression is that of an assemblage of habitations built in the midst of a perfect swamp of mud. Such is Agar Town even to the present day, the little improvements above alluded to as arising from the formation of the railway being confined to the springing up of a few cottages of a better description than the old ones, but which being dotted about here and there, only serve to throw the squalor and wretchedness of the surrounding dwellings into a bolder and more sickening relief.

From all that has just been said, the reader will be able to comprehend that eight years ago, before the formation of the railway in that district, Agar Town must have been one of the lowest, most miserable, and likewise most dangerous regions within the circumference of London. It was indeed the refuge of pauperism, the hiding-place of crime, the abode of wretchedness and squalor, and therefore one of the most prolific hotbeds of demoralization, disease, vice, and profligacy that could be found in the metropolis. Containing but very few shops, and those such as are only to be seen in the poorest neighbourhoods, Agar Town chiefly consisted of lodging-houses, where the avarice of landlords or the poverty of the tenants led to the grouping together of as great a number of occupants as could possibly be squeezed into the smallest imaginable compass. Throughout the whole region the size of the rooms averages about ten or twelve feet square, and at the time of which we are writing, four or five beds, to be occupied by as many different families, were crowded into each room. These beds, consisting only of a wretched flock mattress and a blanket black with grime, were necessarily so close to each other as almost to touch. Thus it might be said that the whole flooring of each room was covered over with bedding as straw is littered down in a

stable; and there did several separate families, comprising persons of both sexes and all ages, huddle together beyond the possibility of any regard for modesty or decency. The same horrible system prevails to a great extent in Agar Town at the present day, but at the time of which we are writing, ere the presence of railway workmen introduced some little civilizing improvements into the place, that herding together of whole families was carried to a frightful extent.

In the year 1844 Agar Town was like a morass where the noxious weeds and poisonous plants had attained to the fulness of their rank growth. It was then swarming with human reptiles, the scum, the outcasts, and the rejected of all society. It was under no parochial care, and appeared to be beyond the reach of any civilizing influences. We do not believe that even the Sunday morning distributers of tracts, who generally poke their noses everywhere, ventured within the precincts of Agar Town. Certainly the parson of no adjacent church ever thought it worth his while to visit the inhabitants of that strange colony, which in every respect was an isolated spot of utter barbarism in the midst of the shining lights of London civilization. It was one of those cesspools into which the moral filth of this modern Babylon regularly and continuously flowed, but which no legislative prudence nor parochial intervention nor philanthropic care ever thought of emptying. Having no gas laid on, no street-lamps of any kind, and but very few shops to throw out even the feeble glimmerings of tallow candles through their dingy panes, Agar Town in dark nights was enveloped in almost utter gloom; and as by the very nature of its few and narrow approaches from the surrounding thoroughfares it stood in the position of a sort of fastness, it necessarily afforded a most convenient asylum for any offender against the law to whom the police might be giving chase in that part of London at the time. Suppose, for example, a thief or other malefactor, disturbed in his depredations anywhere within a small distance of Agar Town, if he could only manage to keep ahead of his pursuers until he dodged off into that maze of dark and dangerous defiles, he might at once relax his speed, take breath, and congratulate himself upon having reached a place that was as good as a sanctuary.

It must not, however, be thought that the police never made incursions into Agar Town, because such an impression

would be erroneous. What we have meant to convey by the preceding remarks is that, from the peculiarity of its situation and the defile nature of its approaches, it afforded advantages, or, at all events, chances of escape for fugitive offenders which no other low neighbourhood of London could present. Amongst the various scenes of demoralization and depravity which characterized the place were "penny gaffs," or, in plain terms, penny theatres, and occasionally the police got scent of the existence and the whereabouts of these cheap dramatic representations. Then, perhaps, just at the moment when an audience of the most dissolute and profligate description, including boys and girls of even a very tender age, were enjoying the dozen murders that formed the plot of some terrible tragedy, or devouring in rapt admiration the insane rantings of a banjo-looking Othello or a seedy Hamlet, the door would burst open, a posse of police rush in, and the whole assemblage of audience and actors be comfortably marched off to the nearest station, to undergo such penalties as the magisterial wisdom might choose to inflict next morning.

But these were not the only occasions on which the myrmidons of the law would make an irruption into Agar Town. Now and then they received information that some of those chemical experimentalists termed "illicit distillers" were working a private still in a secluded nook of that isolated region, for which commerce indeed the whole locality, with the convenience of the canal and barges thereon, was well adapted. Then, in the silence of the night, when the still was in full operation, the abrupt invasion of the police would startle the unlawful experimentalists aforesaid, the genuine product of their industry would be confiscated, and they themselves sent with all the usual circumstances of ignominy to vegetate for a period in prison. But these little variations in the monotony of Agar Town were not of such frequent occurrence as might be expected, considering the almost incessant violations of the law that were taking place in the ways thus specially described.

Such was Agar Town in the year 1844; such, too, it had been for a long time previous, but at that particular epoch it was in the very height of its ignominious glory and the full blow of its pestilential rankness. There, at the corner of one of the little streets, — if the rough, unpaved thoroughfare,

defined only by a couple of rows of squalid-looking habitations, could be denominated a street at all, — stood a public-house bearing the sign of the Billy Goat, the same where Ralph Farefield, nineteen years back, had been wont to meet Chiffin the Cannibal and his desperate associates. This public-house was altogether of a character such as might be expected in such a region. It was, in fact, a boozing-ken of the lowest description, where the liquor was as poisonous as the morals of the company that frequented it. It was kept by an old couple called Patch, the landlord's Christian name being Solomon, although it was not clear that he belonged to the Jewish race. These people had thriven and even grown rich in that place, not altogether by the sale of adulterated liquors, but by acting as recipients for the stolen goods brought thither by some of their principal customers. They likewise lent money at usurious interest; and, indeed, it was proverbial that there was scarcely any means which Solomon Patch would hesitate to adopt in order to increase his gains.

We are now about to introduce our readers into the tap-room of the Billy Goat on the evening of that same Sunday on which Lord Saxondale pursued his inquiries in the neighbourhood of Evergreen Villa, as described in the last chapter. It was about ten o'clock, the shutters were closed, a couple of candles stood upon the table in the tap-room, and the flame of their unsnuffed wicks seemed to burn dimly, like marsh-lights in a mist, through the haze of tobacco-smoke that filled the place. Seven or eight men were seated around the table, with long pipes in their mouths, and with pewter-pots or glasses in front of them. Three or four women were likewise present, and though the company was not very large, yet the noise they made was very great. They seemed all talking at once, some relating anecdotes, others disputing upon mooted points, and others indulging in boisterous shouts of laughter. The characters of all were written upon their countenances. If any one of this motley group had been placed in the dock of the Old Bailey, charged with an offence, no evidence as to respectability of character — even though all the bankers of Lombard Street could, for supposition's sake, be brought forward to give such testimony — would have outweighed with the jury the still more positive evidence of the individual's sinister looks.

At the head of the table sat Chiffin the Cannibal, who by acclamation had been voted into the chair to preside at the orgy. Though nineteen years had fled since we first introduced him to our readers, yet the lapse of time had effected no very striking change in his outward appearance, unless it were to stamp his features still more indelibly than in his younger days with the impress of ferocity and crime. Indeed, it were impossible to conceive a more finished air of ruffianism, or a more consummate aspect of cold-blooded brutality, than this dreadful man presented to the view. His dress was of the same character as that which he was wont to wear when we first spoke of him, namely, a rough, shaggy coat, a battered white hat with a rusty black crape twisted around it, corduroy trousers all greasy and stained, dirty stockings, and great clumsy shoes. His inseparable companion, a stout bludgeon, lay before him on the table, and in the depths of his capacious pockets were a couple of pistols, which he constantly kept loaded. Of all the company present — good Heaven! such a company as it was — he alone abstained from much talking or uproarious noise, his habit being rather of that sullen reserve which usually belongs to the cruel and cold-blooded disposition. At the same time, he by no means discountenanced the hideous mirth and horrible hilarity that were going on around; and from time to time he expressed his approval of some obscene anecdote or desperate exploit by a grim smile, which enhanced rather than relaxed the ruffianism of his features.

It was when the mirth and jollity were at their highest that the trampling of a horse's hoofs suddenly approaching, and then stopping at the door of the public-house, reached the ears of the revellers in the tap-room, and one of the women exclaimed, " There's Lady Bess! "

" Oh, then she's sure to order us a bowl of punch," cried another of the females, clapping her hands joyfully. "Lady Bess always flashes her money about when she comes amongst us."

" Yes, when she does," growled Chiffin the Cannibal, in a deep bass voice that had something cavern-like and sepulchral in its tones, " but how often is it that she does come? She's a deuced sight too proud to suit me."

"Ah, but if she's proud she's so generous! " at once rejoined the first female who had spoken.

Chiffin was about to make some further observation, when the door opened and in walked a person who at first sight would have been taken for one of the male sex, but whom on a nearer survey it was not very difficult to discover to be a woman in man's apparel. For a female, she was of a commanding height, being at least five feet ten inches, and was remarkably though somewhat coarsely handsome. Her features were large but regular; her complexion was of a clear olive, and had the flush of excitement upon her cheeks. Her eyes were large, of the deepest black, and strangely bright; they had an exceeding boldness in their glance, and could look any one full in the face, not frankly, but with a hardihood and audacity altogether unbecoming her sex. Yet her look was not that of wanton impudence nor of lustful passion, because it was fixed just the same upon every one who came for the first time within its reach, whether male or female, handsome or ugly, old or young; it was a look, in short, which seemed meant to penetrate whatever disguise the object of its scrutiny might wear or whatever thoughts were passing in the depths of the soul. It was a strange and overbearing look, not only scrutinizing, but also full of a bold defiance, and as much as to say that though the possessor of those large dark eyes was a woman in sex, yet that she was a man in daring and in dauntlessness.

Without being at all inclined to stoutness, her figure was largely and finely made, upright as the form of an Amazon, without the slightest appearance of that gentle inclination or stoop of the shoulders which belongs to feminine grace, and with an elevated carriage of the head which completed her erect appearance. She was dressed in a handsome frock coat, buttoned around the waist, but open at the bosom, so as to display the fine cambric shirt-front and the exquisite frill. This frill, by occupying, as it were, the interval between the swell of the bosoms, concealed their fulness and thus aided the general effects of the apparel in giving a masculine air to the female wearer. The edges of a figured silk waistcoat were seen under the lapels of her coat; she wore a stand-up shirt collar, and had a shawl-neckerchief tied with a care that Beau Brummel might have envied. She had on black pantaloons, and possessing a remarkable straightness and evident symmetry of limbs, that portion of her masculine garb became her admirably. Patent-leather

boots, the brilliant gloss of which even now shone brightly through the dust that was upon them, set off her long, narrow feet to great advantage, and the clinking spurs gave her a sort of semimilitary appearance. Her hair, which was of raven blackness, appeared when she took off her hat to be combed back from the high and open forehead, and though not worn very long, fell in rich and natural waves over her ears and to the lower edge of the collar of the coat, so that in fact it was not longer than the hair of many fashionable youths at the West End of London. She wore a pair of delicate buckskin gloves, and carried a handsome riding-whip in her hand.

We have already said that this woman's features, though exceedingly handsome, were largely chiseled and somewhat coarse. This was especially observed in the mouth, the lips being full, yet not with that sweet pouting expression which gives a charm to such fulness of lips in woman. Of a rich and moist red, they were not merely luscious but strongly sensual lips, yet when parted they revealed teeth faultlessly even and white as ivory. When first casting the eye upon her, and ere the delusion as to her sex was thoroughly cleared up, the absence of beard or whisker was not immediately noticed, in consequence of the olive duskiness of her complexion, which gave her a masculine air; and then, too, that bold and hardy gaze which she invariably fixed upon any stranger the moment she encountered one likewise tended to sustain the idea of the sex whose apparel she had assumed. Her age might be about twenty-five or twenty-six, but when considered in her male apparel, she at once struck the beholder as being a young man of one and twenty. When she spoke, it was in a voice that was strong without being coarse or harsh; it had all that flutelike power of tone which was also calculated to deceive the observer as to her real sex and sustain the delusion. Who or what she was will hereafter transpire in due course, but at present we can only introduce her to the reader as Lady Bess.

On entering the wretched tap-room an expression of disgust flitted across her features, but almost instantaneously throwing aside that look, she said, with a careless smile and in an offhand manner, " Well, you are all deep in your orgy. I suppose it began ere sunset and will last till at least sunrise? "

"Will you sit down and join us?" asked Chiffin the Cannibal.

"No, I have not time," responded Lady Bess, beating one of her legs negligently with the horsewhip as she surveyed the group through the haze of tobacco-smoke.

"You never have time," growled Chiffin, in a surly manner.

"But I have had time, though, to do you a service," immediately rejoined Lady Bess, "and when you had just recovered from a long illness I gave you assistance in the hour of your need. I have never asked it back again, I have never wanted it, I would not take it even were it offered, but what I do look for, is civility in return."

"Lady Bess is right!" exclaimed several voices, all the females joining in without exception.

"Come, we will have no disputing," said the Amazonian beauty. Then opening the door, she cried out, "Solomon! Where is that scoundrel, old Solomon?"

"Here I be, my lady," answered a fawning, obsequious voice from behind the bar outside. "What's your ladyship's orders? Bill's holding your ladyship's horse."

"A truce to so many ladyships," exclaimed the woman in male attire, "and bring in two crown bowls of punch; and then bid your old wife prepare such supper as her larder affords, and charge the whole to me."

"There, didn't I say her ladyship would come down handsome?" cried the female who had previously predicted the regale of punch that had just been ordered. "But wouldn't it be a greater treat still if Lady Bess would sit down and drink it with us?"

"To be sure. To be sure!" cried many voices.

"But while thanking you for the compliment," said Lady Bess, "I have already told you that I have no time. Now, who is there here that will do me a service? — I mean amongst the men, for it is a message that I wish to send."

Several of the male revellers volunteered, and Lady Bess, sweeping her bright eyes over them, as if to select the one whom she most fancied for the purpose, said, "I choose you, Tony Wilkins."

The individual to whom she thus addressed herself was a young man of not more than three or four and twenty, but whose looks fell very little short of those of any of his

companions in their sinister expression and evil nature. He was clad in a squalid garb, and his appearance altogether was such that it seemed scarcely credible any person in his senses would have trusted him out of sight to get change for even half a crown. Yet it appeared that Lady Bess knew her man, and saw something in him which convinced her that he would faithfully execute her commission. This surmise on her part seemed fully corroborated by the zeal with which he had at first volunteered, and the evident pleasure with which he found himself the select object of her choice.

"Now, Tony," continued Lady Bess, drawing forth a small sealed packet from her pocket, "you must take this, and run as hard as you can down to King's Cross. There you will see a tall gentleman enveloped in a cloak, and with his hat slouched over his features. He will be lounging about near the statue. You must accost him, and say, 'The night is dark.' He will answer, 'But it can be made brighter.' If he gives you this reply, you will at once thrust the little packet into his hand and speed off instantaneously. But should he not give that reply, you will know he is not the individual whom you seek, and you must look out for another answering the description I have given. However, as it is not likely on this warm summer night that any individual, unless for a particular purpose, would wrap himself up in a cloak, it is next to certain that the first whom you meet thus muffled, will be the one for whom the packet is destined. Having performed your commission, you can come back and enjoy your share of the supper I have ordered, and here is a guinea to indemnify you for your loss of so much of the punch as will be disposed of in your absence."

Tony Wilkins promised to acquit himself faithfully of his errand, and taking the little parcel, he secured it in the pocket of the greasy coat that hung loose about his person. He then stuck a battered hat upon his head, and was about to hurry forth, when Lady Bess stopped him for a moment, saying, "I do not question your honesty toward me, Tony, because I know that all of you here would do me a service if you could, — yes, even Chiffin, who growled at me just now," and as she spoke she bent her eyes with a perfect blaze of lustre upon the Cannibal, who evidently shrank from their

overawing power. "But still I may as well hint, Tony," she continued, again turning around toward her messenger, "that there is nothing in the packet of any value to a soul save the individual into whose hands you are to give it; and therefore if the devil should tempt you, it will not be worth your while to sneak out of your way and open it in the expectation of finding money or banknotes."

"I wouldn't do it, I wouldn't do it," answered Tony Wilkins, with an air of sincerity which for an instant rose dominant above the sinister expression of his countenance, and without another word, he darted away.

The old landlord and his wife now made their appearance with the two steaming bowls of punch, and when they were placed upon the table, Lady Bess filled a wine-glass, saying, "I drink success to you all. Come, Chiffin, I am determined to put you into a good humour, and you shall pledge me in a glass."

"Well, I don't know how it is, but you make us all do just as you like, Lady Bess," said the Cannibal, half-good-humouredly and half-sullenly. "You've got a power over us. I suppose it is because you are so superior to the general run of us folks."

"Never mind what is the reason," exclaimed the Amazonian lady, laughing. "Drink your punch, Chiffin, and do try to look good-natured for once."

The Cannibal, as if obeying a sort of magical influence which he could not resist, did as he was ordered; and as he put down the emptied glass he smacked his lips, while a grim smile expanded completely over his hangdog countenance, as he said, "I do really think that if I saw anybody trying to do you an injury, Lady Bess, I should give them six inches of my clasp-knife, even though I swung for it."

"Well, it may be useful to have such a champion as you, Chiffin," exclaimed the dashing lady, with a merry laugh which displayed her ivory teeth to the utmost advantage. "But now I must be off."

"Will you not wait," inquired one of the women, "to see if Tony comes back all right?"

"I know he will," replied Lady Bess. "He is one of the greatest scamps amongst you, and therefore the best to be trusted. And now good night."

With these words she quitted the room, paused at the bar

outside to pay for all she had ordered, and then issuing forth, mounted her steed, which the pot-boy was holding. It was a splendid animal, of dark chestnut colour, with a proudly arching neck, and of Arabian fineness of limb. Lady Bess tossed the pot-boy half a crown, and then gently walked the noble animal, which she bestrode with the most perfect experience, over the rough, uneven road till she emerged from Agar Town, and entering Maiden Lane, galloped away in the direction of the country.

In about a quarter of an hour after her departure, Tony Wilkins returned to the tap-room of the Billy Goat, and to the inquiring look which his friends, both male and female, flung upon him, he answered, " It's all right. I met the gen'leman in the cloak; he give the watchwords, and so I gived him the packet."

" What sort of a looking feller was he? " asked one of the women.

" I'm blowed if I could see his face," replied Tony. " He took precious good care of that. But he was tall and dressed like a reg'lar gen'leman."

" Perhaps he's Lady Bess's lover? " suggested another of the women.

" Lover, indeed! " growled Chiffin, contemptuously. " I don't think such a woman as Lady Bess knows what love is. She's altogether above common things. In short, she's a strange creature, and I'm hanged if I can half-understand her. Since first — "

The Cannibal's observations were here interrupted by the opening of the tap-room door, and the entrance of a woman who was at once welcomed by all present and saluted by the name of Madge Somers. She was between forty and fifty years of age, had very harsh features, and dark hair turning gray. She wore an old cloak, the hood of which was drawn partly over her head, but not so much as to conceal a dingy white cap with great frills very much tumbled, as if she were wont to sleep in it at night as well as wear it in the daytime.

" Well, Madge, what's brought you here just now? " asked Chiffin.

" To speak to you," was the response. " Something has turned up to-day that promises a harvest, so I want you to help me to reap it."

" Well, you sha'n't have to ask twice. But are we to talk it over now? "

" Yes, at once, because I want to be getting back homeward," and the woman, who had not sat down, beckoned Chiffin to follow her from the room.

He did so, and they ascended to a private apartment on the upper floor, where they remained together for half an hour in earnest conversation. At the end of this interview Madge Somers took her departure from the Billy Goat, while Chiffin the Cannibal rejoined his companions in the tap-room to partake of the supper for which Lady Bess had paid.

CHAPTER XII

THE COTTAGE AGAIN

It was about nine o'clock on the following evening, when Lord Saxondale, in pursuance of the appointment he had made with the woman at the cottage, knocked at the door of that lonesome habitation. His summons was at once answered by the woman herself, and he was admitted into the same sordid little room where he had held his conference with her on the previous day. A single candle was burning upon the table, but so dimly that it made the place look so gloomy as at first to send a very unpleasant sensation thrilling through the entire form of the young nobleman.

"Well, what news?" he hastened to demand, fixing his eyes upon the woman.

"I told you that I should have some favourable intelligence to report," she at once answered. "But sit down and listen to me."

Saxondale had been drinking pretty freely, according to his wont, ere he quitted the dining-table to keep his present appointment, and his transient fears at finding himself in that gloomy-looking place now vanished in a moment. He accordingly sat down, already inspired with hope and rekindling passion at the encouraging words which the woman had uttered.

"Last evening," she resumed, "I managed to get into conversation with the lady's-maid down at Evergreen Villa, and finding that she was naturally talkative, I began to draw her out. Without telling you everything that took place, or how I wormed myself into her confidence, I may at once proceed to state that I told her how an elegant and rich young gentleman was very desperately in love with her mistress. The lady's-maid grew deeply interested on hearing

this, for she no doubt at once saw a rich harvest of bribes for herself. So we pretty soon began to understand each other. She told me that her mistress belongs to the opera — "

" To be sure, I knew that already," exclaimed Saxondale. " But still I am glad to find the thing confirmed in this way, and that it is really she who does live there, so that there can be no mistake about it. But go on. What next did the maid tell you about her charming mistress? "

" In the first place, that she sees very little company," continued the woman, " only a few friends connected with the opera; that she regularly walks out in the fields every morning when it is fine, immediately after breakfast, sometimes alone, but generally attended by her maid."

"Ah, and at what o'clock is that? " demanded Saxondale, impatiently.

" Between nine and ten o'clock," replied the woman, " quite in the cool of the morning."

" Capital! " ejaculated Edmund. " I will throw myself in the way of my fair one to-morrow. Have you got the disguise? " he asked, eagerly.

" Yes, here it is," responded the woman, as she pointed to a large brown paper parcel. " The maid is already initiated with respect to your intentions, and she will not fail to draw the notice of her young mistress to you in your mechanic's dress. Oh, I warrant you she will know how to manage the thing cleverly enough, bidding her mistress observe what a genteel, elegant-looking young fellow it is for a working man."

" Nothing can be better," exclaimed Saxondale, rubbing his hands together joyfully with the anticipations of success. " I tell you what I think I shall do. I shall go up to the tavern, pass the night there, and come back here early in the morning to put on the artisan dress — "

"And stand the risk of being recognized by the people of the tavern," interrupted the woman, " so that it will get spread all over the place, like wildfire, that there's a young gentleman going about sometimes in the clothing suitable to his station, and at others in a humble garb. Thus you will be watched and dogged and have all your motions pried into, so that all hope of carrying out your romantic plan will be effectually destroyed."

"You are right, my worthy monitress," observed Edmund. "I must do nothing foolish to mar the plot."

"Besides," she immediately continued, "I had a room up-stairs all nicely cleaned out for you to-day and put into the best possible order. There's a comfortable bed that I bought, a washing-stand, and everything requisite, though in a humble way. It's true the bed is upon the floor, as there was no time to get a bedstead put up, and besides I did not like to make too many preparations, for fear of attracting notice."

"Enough, my good woman," exclaimed Saxondale. "I had forgotten at the moment our understanding of yesterday afternoon, that I was to have a shake-down bed here. At all events, I can try it for one night."

"And then," added the woman, "if you feel yourself uncomfortable, you might take some little obscure lodging in the village, passing yourself off as a mechanic."

"To be sure," cried Saxondale. "Your advice is in all respects excellent. It shall be as you say, and now, as the night is remarkably fine, I will just take a stroll for half an hour, smoke a cigar in the fields, and then on my return go to bed. I suppose you have got such a thing as a drop of spirits in the house? For wine is not to be thought of here."

"On the contrary," said the woman, "I have done my best to make you as comfortable as I can." Then opening a cupboard and taking forth three bottles, she said, "I brought these with me in my basket from town to-day."

She likewise produced a corkscrew, some glasses (evidently newly purchased), and a jug of fresh water. Saxondale uncorked the bottles, and tasted their contents one after another; then repudiating the wine, he mixed himself a tumbler of brandy and water. This he quickly imbibed, and then lighting his cigar, strolled forth from the cottage. For about three-quarters of an hour he sauntered through the fields, enjoying the fragrance of his Havana in the calm freshness of the evening, and thinking over the brilliant conquest he felt certain of achieving. It was about half-past ten when he returned to the hut, where he was immediately admitted by the woman; and on being again conducted into her little room, he found the table spread with a clean napkin, and a little supper consisting of a cold fowl, a lobster,

a new loaf, and some bottled porter, arranged upon the board. Everything looked perfectly clean, notwithstanding the sordid appearance of the place itself and the untidy aspect of the woman. The walk had given the young nobleman an appetite, the romantic adventure, as he considered it, had put him into good spirits, and so he sat down and did justice to the fare. Another tumbler of brandy and water exhilarated his spirits still more, and when he had thus concluded his repast, he felt every inclination to retire to rest, so that he might rise early in the morning and prepare for the " love-campaign," as he called it.

" I do not know," said the woman, as she lighted another candle ere conducting him to the chamber up-stairs, " whether it is an oversight on your part, or whether you have purposely forborne from telling me who you are. If you desire to keep your name secret, of course I do not wish to know; it cannot be any business of mine. But if otherwise, and you have no reason for hiding your name, you may as well tell it to me."

" I have not the slightest objection," answered the young nobleman, " because I have every reason to believe that you are as discreet as you are astute. I am Lord Saxondale."

" I felt convinced you were a young gentleman of rank," said the woman, " and I told the lady's-maid so last night. And now excuse me for hinting that it will be as well to give the complaisant abigail a bribe as early as possible, and if you like, I can manage to see her the very first thing in the morning, before she accompanies her mistress in her walk."

" Oh, to be sure," exclaimed Saxondale. " By all means put the lady's-maid in a good humour," and as he thus spoke he drew forth his purse, which had a quantity of gold in one end and several bank-notes in the other. " Here, give her this note," he continued, selecting one for ten pounds. " But, no, gold is better. The fair sex always prefer gold. So you shall present her with these ten sovereigns as an earnest of still more liberal rewards," and he tossed the money down upon the table.

" The maid shall have this before eight o'clock to-morrow morning," said the woman.

" I see that you will not let the grass grow under your feet," observed Saxondale, with a smile. " And now for

this room where I am to sleep. But, by the bye, let us take up the garb in which I am to appear to-morrow."

"Your lordship would embellish even the most wretched rags," said the woman, knowing how to flatter him, "and therefore you cannot possibly look otherwise than well, even in this rough suit."

Thus speaking, she took the bundle in one hand and the candle in the other, and led the way up the rickety ladder-like staircase to the story above. There she introduced Lord Saxondale into a room, the wretched appearance of which contrasted strangely with the splendidly furnished chamber to which he was accustomed at home. Still was it evident that all attempts had been made to render it as habitable as possible. A quantity of hay, having a very fragrant odour, had been thickly spread upon the floor, and on this the mattress was placed. It was quite new, as were also the sheets and blankets. Nevertheless Lord Saxondale made a somewhat wry face as he inspected these accommodations; and he was about to remark that although they would do for one night, yet he could not put up with them for a longer period, when it struck him that he had better not risk the chance of offending a woman who not only seemed to enter heart and soul into his projects, but who had likewise done the best she could to make him comfortable. Suppressing, therefore, any display of ill-humour, he allowed his features to brighten up, and even laughed as he exclaimed, "Only think of the descendants of a family dating its origin back to the time of the Tudors, plunging headlong into such an adventure as this."

"The little hardships which you thus endure, my lord," replied the woman, "should be considered as adding to the romance of the whole adventure."

"True!" cried Saxondale. "That is at least a consolation. And now open the parcel and put out my rough garments in readiness for me to assume in the morning."

The woman accordingly placed the mechanic's garb upon a chair near the humble bed, and leaving the candle on the washing-stand, bade her guest "good night." As soon as she had left the room, Saxondale disapparelled himself and lay down to rest. Being much wearied, he did not find the bed altogether so uncomfortable as he had anticipated, and while in the midst of imagination's revels

respecting the transcendent beauties of Angela Vivaldi, he soon sank off into a profound sleep.

It was about midnight when the woman, who had not yet retired to rest, put on her old ragged cloak, and drawing the hood over her head, stole very gently forth from the hut. Traversing the field, she looked about her as she neared the hedge that formed its boundary; and in a few moments, from the dark shade thereof the form of a man emerged into the clear starlight.

"Well, Madge, is it all right?" said Chiffin the Cannibal, for he the individual was.

"All right," she answered. "The young fellow is fast asleep. I stole up to the door of his room ten minutes back, and could hear by his measured respiration that he was in a deep slumber."

"And what about the booty?" demanded Chiffin. "Is the game worth all this trouble?"

"Shall you be content with a hundred pounds or so, for your share?" inquired the woman, as she recrossed the field, accompanied by the Cannibal, in the direction of the cottage.

"I believe you, old gal. But have you made sure?"

"I told you last night at the Billy Goat," responded Madge Somers, "that the jewelry he wears about his person is worth a good fifty pounds, even in the way that we shall have to sell it. Solomon Patch will give that sum, for to buy it in the shops it would cost three times as much. There's his watch and chain, diamond studs, and three beautiful rings on his fingers. Then his purse is well lined, I know, for I managed to make him pull it out, so that I might judge of its contents. There's a lot of gold in one end, and ever so many bank-notes in the other. I caught a glimpse of a fifty and a twenty, and there are others besides, the amount of which I could not catch at a glance."

"Well, this looks promising," remarked the Cannibal, grasping his club with a firmer grip. "I've got all my tools about me," he added, with a diabolic leer, "pistols, clasp-knife, and so on. But what about the shovel to dig the grave?"

"I have not forgotten it," responded Madge. "It is there, at the hut. I procured it along with the other things in town this morning. And I'll tell you, moreover, what

I have done. I have made his bed upon a thick layer of hay."

"I understand," exclaimed Chiffin, "to save the floor from the blood when we draw a knife across his throat or stick a dagger into him, eh? Well, it's a good precaution. There's nothing so dangerous as blood-marks, for I've heard say they can't be washed out. But have you ascertained who the young spark is?"

"Suppose he is a lord, should you flinch?" asked the woman.

"Flinch!" repeated the Cannibal, with savage contempt, "why should I? What the deuce is a lord to me?"

"To be sure, what indeed?" said the woman. "Well, then, this young blade is Lord Saxondale."

"Lord Saxondale!" exclaimed Chiffin, in astonishment.

"Yes," answered the woman, struck by her companion's manner, which she was evidently at a loss to comprehend. "Do you know anything of him? Why did you seem so surprised at the mention of his name?"

"Only because I once had something to do in connection with that there family," replied Chiffin. "But that was nineteen or twenty years ago, and then my services was engaged by a chap named Farefield. However, all that's gone and done, and if there's money to be got here to-night, I don't care what the young fellow's name is."

By the time this colloquy was ended, Madge Somers and the Cannibal had reached the door of the cottage, and the woman gently lifting the latch, passed into the place, followed by her male companion. She then shut the door again with equal caution, while the Cannibal, who seemed perfectly familiar with the habitation, at once entered the ground floor room, where the food, wine, and spirits still remained upon the table. The night air had sharpened his appetite, and without a moment's hesitation he sat down and began making a hearty meal, not forgetting to pay his respects to the brandy-bottle, wine being no favourite beverage with him. He did not take above ten minutes thus to satisfy his appetite, which the idea of the horrible crime he had come thither to perpetrate by no means marred, while the fiery alcohol added, if possible, to the ferocious ruffianism of his mood.

"Now," said the woman, who, without taking off her

cloak, had seated herself and remained perfectly silent while her companion was eating, " let us not lose another moment, —for the body must be disposed of before morning," she added, in a very low voice.

With these words she approached the cupboard and took forth a dagger, the point of which she tried with one of her fingers.

" You mean to play your part in it, then," said the Cannibal, in a whisper and with a grim look.

" What matters it who does the work? " she demanded. " We are neither of us squeamish, I suppose. But in case he should happen to awake as we enter the room, and either cry out or offer any resistance, it will be better for us both to be prepared."

" All right," observed Chiffin. " And now to business."

Madge Somers took up the candle with her left hand, and holding the dagger in her right, led the way from the room. As noiselessly as possible did she ascend the steps, with Chiffin close at her heels. On reaching the door of Saxondale's chamber, they stopped and listened, and the regular and even respiration of the young nobleman convinced them that he still slept profoundly. They accordingly opened the door and stole in. Madge, who led the way, advanced straight up to the bed, and as the flaring candle which she held in her hand threw its light upon the countenance of Edmund, both she and her murderous companion saw, as they suspected, that he was wrapped in the profoundest slumber. But just as they were about to do the work of death, a sudden ejaculation of mingled horror and amazement burst from the lips of Madge Somers, and dropping the candle in the fearful excitement which had so abruptly and strangely seized upon her, the chamber was plunged into darkness.

That ejaculation to which she gave vent, and the noise of the candlestick falling, startled young Saxondale with galvanic effect from his slumbers, and springing up from the mattress, he cried out, " Thieves! Murder! " as loudly as he could vociferate.

Madge Somers, recovering her presence of mind the very instant she had dropped the candle, clutched Chiffin with nervous violence by the arm, and in a quick but low whisper said, " Go! " The ruffian, astounded at what had just

"ADVANCED STRAIGHT UP TO THE BED"
Photogravure from original by Bird

happened, but having not a moment for reflection, and being too much bewildered to act of his own accord, at once obeyed the woman's command, for which it no doubt struck him there must be some good and excellent reason. She at the same time banged the door violently behind him, as if to enforce with additional energy the order she had given for his retreat; and then hastening toward Saxondale, who had begun vociferating as ere now described, she said, "Hold your tongue. It is nothing."

"But that noise, what was it?" asked Edmund, quaking and quivering all over. "For God's sake, don't hurt me! Take my purse, if you want it, but — but —" and his teeth chattered audibly.

"I tell you that you have nothing to fear," exclaimed Madge Somers. "I would not hurt you, and I do not want your purse."

"But what has happened? What is the disturbance?" inquired Edmund, still with tremulous voice and quivering limbs, as he stood upright by the side of the bed from which he had leaped. "Tell me, what are you doing here? What noise was that? Did I not see something glitter in your hand?"

"No, nothing — only the candlestick that I dropped," at once replied Madge, who had already concealed the dagger under her cloak.

But here we should observe that although the light had been extinguished by the fall of the candle, yet the room was not enveloped in total obscurity, for the glimmering of the starlight through the small and dingy window rendered objects somewhat discernible. Therefore the young nobleman could perceive the figure of the woman standing near him, and observing that she was not undressed, naturally argued that she had not been in bed at all. But he likewise perceived that she had no one with her, and this latter circumstance somewhat reassured him.

"It was only a drunken man who would force his way into the house," continued Madge. "But make haste and dress yourself. You must go away from this place at once. Ask me no questions, and do as I tell you without delay. You must manage to resume your apparel in the dark, and in a few minutes I will come up to you again. But fear nothing, I repeat; no harm shall befall you."

Then, snatching up the candlestick, and without waiting for a reply, much less to answer any of the questions which the young nobleman might think fit to put relative to all these singular proceedings, she abruptly quitted the room, closing the door behind her. On descending the ladder-stairs she found Chiffin waiting below with eager impatience to learn the cause of those sudden emotions on her part which had not merely made her cry out and drop the candle, but also abandon all in a moment the murderous intent that had been harboured against her guest.

Having hastily lighted the candle again, in the room where the supper-things were, she said, in a low but resolute tone, "Remain you here quietly, and I will explain everything. I cannot tell you now, but when he is safe out of the house — "

"What?" asked Chiffin, his countenance becoming as dark as night, "do you mean that he is to escape us?"

"Yes, I do mean so," returned the woman, in whose looks there was a strange firmness mingled with a sort of wild agitation. "You have known me well enough, Chiffin, and I should think too well, not to be aware that I am acting for the best."

"Well, it may be so," growled the Cannibal, savagely, "but it seems a strange way of doing things."

"It is nevertheless my way," rejoined Madge, with a still more dogged air of determination. "So sit down, take some brandy to put you into a better humour, and wait till I return. I shall be with you again in three or four minutes. Here, lend me the candle; you can manage for yourself in the dark till I come back."

Having thus spoken, Madge Somers took up the candle and left the room, closing the door behind her.

Meanwhile Edmund, considerably relieved from his terrors by the assurances of safety which the woman had given him, but thoroughly bewildered by the strangeness of the whole proceeding, had lost no time in resuming his apparel, and he had scarcely dressed himself when she reappeared with a light in her hand. He immediately fixed his eyes upon her, to see whether she came with any hostile intent; and though there was certainly little to glean of an encouraging character from a countenance naturally sinister and repulsive, yet at the same time he beheld nought

in her looks to belie the assurances of safety she had ere now given him. She nevertheless gazed upon him with a singular earnestness, that had, however, nothing threatening in it, and yet her regards were of a nature which he could not comprehend.

" You doubtless wish for explanations why you must depart so abruptly and in the middle of the night," she said, at length breaking silence, and speaking in that curt, blunt, and imperious manner which seemed habitual to her, " but you will receive none from my lips. It suits me to act in this way. But there is one point on which I may as well enlighten you at once, which is, that all I told you about my having seen or spoken to the lady's-maid at Evergreen Villa is pure invention on my part. I never took any trouble at all in the matter, and know nothing more of the young lady or her concerns than what I told you yesterday when you first came to the cottage. And now depart."

" But this is most singular, most unaccountable! " exclaimed Saxondale, his courage reviving in proportion as he saw that there was actually no ground for alarm.

" Depart, I say! " cried Madge Somers, stamping her foot impatiently. " If you stayed here for an hour, you would not drag from my lips a single word more than I choose to tell you."

Lord Saxondale, perceiving that it was utterly useless to stand arguing the point with this singular woman, no longer hesitated to obey her command, and he accordingly followed her from the room. She descended the stairs with the candle in her hand, and held open the cottage door, her entire manner evincing an unaccountable impatience for him to begone. He accordingly went forth without another word, and speeding across the fields, entered the Seven Sisters Road.

Meanwhile Madge Somers closed the front door and returned to her companion Chiffin, whom she found seated near the table and drinking large draughts of brandy and water, to which he had managed to help himself by aid of the glimmering light that peeped in through the window.

CHAPTER XIII

A GLANCE AT THE PAST

WHATEVER intention Madge Somers might have had, a few minutes back, of entering into full particulars with Chiffin the Cannibal as to the cause of her singular behaviour toward Lord Saxondale, she had come to a very opposite resolution by the time she returned to him. In short, for reasons best known to herself, she had entirely changed her mind, and determined to keep her own counsel. At the same time there were certain particulars to which he had briefly alluded when they were crossing the field together, and respecting which she was anxious to obtain the fullest and completest explanations. Madge Somers therefore felt that she had a difficult game to play with the formidable Chiffin, and that it would require all her arts of diplomacy to effect the double object of satisfying him in respect to her own conduct, and at the same time gleaning what she wanted to know from his lips.

"You are enjoying yourself," she said, flinging off her old cloak and sitting down near the table.

"Well, I think it wants something to put one in a good humour after this disappointment," growled the Cannibal. "But it wasn't for a glass of brandy and water that I came up here to-night, I can tell you," he added. "Who's to pay me the hundred pounds I have just lost by your silly nonsense in letting that young fellow go? For I haven't forgot that you said just now my share would come to that amount."

"Now, Chiffin," answered Madge Somers, "you have known me some years, and I have never deceived you in business matters, have I?"

"No, I can't say that you have," responded the Cannibal,

sullenly. " We have done a few things together, and you have always been fair and straightforward enough, there's no denying that; and now, what next? "

" You will believe me, then, if I make you a certain promise? " said Madge, interrogatively.

" Yes, I think I may," replied Chiffin, " for we all know you are a strange kind of a creature, and there's some of the folks down at Sol Patch's really fancies you are a witch. I don't mean no offence, Madge — "

" Witches need not have recourse to the means I adopt for a living," rejoined the woman, abruptly. " But about this promise of mine. If I tell you that to-morrow evening at nine o'clock I will bring you a hundred pounds to the Billy Goat, or anywhere else you choose to appoint, will you be satisfied for the loss of your booty this night? And I think you ought to be," she added, ere he had time to answer, " for it will be a hundred pounds earned by you without risk, whereas if this work had been done to-night there would have been risk, although everything was so nicely arranged to make all traces disappear."

" Well, if I was sure of having the blunt to-morrow night," said Chiffin, slowly suffering himself to be pacified, " I shouldn't care much about that young fellow being allowed to walk clean off under my very nose, as one may say."

" Then you shall have the hundred pounds to-morrow night, Chiffin," said Madge Somers, with the confidence of one who knows that the promise will be fulfilled.

" And now you will tell me," asked the Cannibal, " what the deuce all this means, why you dropped the candle and called out, why you pushed me from the room and banged the door as a signal that I wasn't wanted, and why you let the young chap escape at all."

" Did you not see that he opened his eyes all in a moment, just as we were bending over the bed? " asked Madge.

" No, that I didn't," replied Chiffin, gruffly, " and if he did open his eyes like that, then all I can say is, I can't believe mine, because it seemed to me that he was asleep as sound as a rock."

" Well, then," rejoined Madge, doggedly, " I can tell you that he did. I was closest to him and I saw him open his eyes."

"And suppose he did," exclaimed Chiffin, " what then? Why did that prevent us from doing his business? "

" I don't know how it was, but a sudden weakness came upon me," answered Madge. " I could not find it in my heart — "

" Oh, that be hanged! " growled Chiffin. " I don't believe it for a minute; it's all nonsense. A sudden weakness over you, Madge? Why, you must take me for a downright fool — "

" Never mind what I take you for, Chiffin," interrupted the woman, with a look and manner which showed that she was not to be frightened by him. " I tell you that some strange feeling of remorse or pity or fear, I don't know which it was, but perhaps all three united, came over me at the time, and I could not possibly do the deed or yet let it be done. It seemed as if an invisible hand was stretched out to save him."

" Well, I don't know what to think of it," observed Chiffin, sullenly. " It's a strange story, Madge, to come from your lips."

"And I am a strange woman, too, am I not? " she demanded, abruptly. " You yourself said so just now."

"And so you are, and it's perhaps on that account you suddenly took it into your queer head to let the young fellow go. Well," he continued, refilling his glass with brandy and water, " I suppose what you say must be the case; and if you only keep your word and come down with the blunt to-morrow night, I sha'n't bother myself any longer about your strange conduct of just now."

"You may rely upon my punctuality," said Madge. "At nine o'clock I will be in Agar Town. But while we were crossing the field, you said something about having done business for one of the Saxondale family several years ago."

"And so I did," answered Chiffin, "and now I recollect, it was just about this time nineteen years back. But it wasn't exactly for any one bearing the name of Saxondale. The old lord was alive then, and this covey who was here to-night was only just born."

" I recollect you mentioned the name of a person called Farefield," said Madge.

" Yes, Ralph Farefield," rejoined Chiffin. " It was him that employed me. Ah, it is a rum affair altogether, and I

never could make out how that Ralph Farefield came by his death."

"A strange affair, was it?" said Madge Somers. "Come, Chiffin, your glass is empty, and although it's late, you are accustomed to sit up, and we may as well have a friendly chat while we are about it. Besides, I mean to have a glass myself. So come, refill your own."

"I don't mind if I do," said Chiffin, suiting the action to the word.

"Let's see, what were we talking about?" said Madge, who had likewise brewed a glass for herself. "Oh, I remember, that strange story of the Saxondale family nineteen years ago. Come, I am just in a humour for a good gossip to-night."

"Then it's a very strange humour of yours, Madge," said Chiffin, "for, generally speaking, you ain't accustomed to talk more than is necessary."

"Oh, but people are not always in the saying humour," said the woman.

"Well, that's true," remarked Chiffin. "I myself don't generally chatter and talk about my exploits, except when I am preciously in the wind, and then I let out everything. Did I ever tell you," asked the ruffian, on whom the frequent potations of brandy and water were producing an effect, "how it was I come to be called the Cannibal?"

"Yes, you have told me that story," returned Madge, "and it is precisely because you told it so well, that I want to know about this other business of which you are speaking, — I mean the Saxondale affair."

"Well, come, I will tell you all about it," said the Cannibal. "You must know that Ralph Farefield was the old lord's nephew, and was a sad, wild fellow, who ran through a lot of money and spoke ill of his uncle. So the old lord was resolved to cut him out, and went and married a young girl, all in a great hurry. By her he had three children, two daughters and a son. Now, this didn't suit Mr. Ralph's book at all, because the little Edmund would succeed to the peerage and estates. So Ralph determined to have him made away with, and somehow or other he found me out. Well, I wasn't over-particular, and Ralph had gold enough to tempt me; besides which I looked to the future, and thought that if through me Ralph got to be Lord Saxondale it would be as

good as a pension as long as I lived. So I soon fell into Ralph's plans, and agreed to act. I and some of my pals were to go down into Lincolnshire, carry off the brat, poison it, and then leave the body in some public place where it was sure to be seen. Because, don't you understand, Mr. Ralph could scarcely claim to be the heir unless the death of little Edmund was proved? Well, me and the pals went down into Lincolnshire; but for some days we didn't succeed, and as I began to fear that so many suspicious-looking fellows lurking about might cause an alarm and spoil the whole game, I told them to pack off to Gainsborough, which was only a few miles away, and there wait for me."

Here Chiffin paused to imbibe some more alcoholic fluid, which having done, he pursued his narrative in the following manner:

"The moment I began to act alone, I had good luck, for I succeeded in carrying off the child from its nurse. I had a black mask on my face and frightened the poor girl terribly, so that she fell down in a fit, while I ran away as hard as I could, with the baby in my arms. I soon slipped the mask off my face, and made straight for a grove that I saw at a distance. Having reached it, I sat down to rest, and also to do the remainder of my work, which was to kill the child and strip it of its outer clothes, so as to give Ralph Farefield a proof that I had fulfilled my mission. But when I felt in my pocket for the little phial of poison, I found it broke, and so I thought to myself there was nothing left to do but to tie a string around the little creature's neck and strangle it. However, I began stripping the clothes off first, stuffing them into my pockets as I did so, and then I noticed that the child had the mark of a strawberry on its neck. A very singular mark it was, so singular that I couldn't help looking at it, though it was but a tiny mark, not so big as a sixpence. Well, I had just torn off a string from the child's petticoat and was going to fasten it around his neck, — for he was crying a great deal and I wanted to put an end to the business at once, — when all of a sudden I heard the voices of several men close by, but I could not immediately see who they were, on account of the thickness of the foliage. Well, thought I to myself, there was a chase after the child, and if I was caught stripping it and with its clothes in my pocket, too, I should swing for it. So, dropping the brat

in a jiffy, I started up and rushed away quite in a different direction from the one where I had heard the voices. Just as I got out of the grove, however, I ran against a great tall hulking gipsy man with a large stick in his hand. He cried out in a savage manner, asking what the deuce I meant by running against him like that, and then he gave me a good tap with his stick, in return for which I knocked him down with my bludgeon. But the next moment I had four or five other gipsy men at my heels, who came rushing out of the grove on hearing the disturbance. So, not choosing to stay and fight with such numbers, I cut off as fast as my legs would carry me. They did not pursue me far, and I got clear away. I then sat down and began to reflect what I should do, whether I should go back and endeavour to regain possession of the child, or not; for I now felt quite sure that the voices which had alarmed me were those of the gipsy men and not of any persons in search of the bantling. But then I thought that if I returned into the grove the gipsies would either beat me to death for having knocked down their comrade, or else, out of revenge, and perhaps with the hope of reward, go and hand me over to the constables of the nearest town for having stolen and stripped a child. So I was obliged to come to the resolution of leaving things to take their chance, and telling Ralph Farefield the most plausible story I could invent to satisfy him. I accordingly made the best of the way to Gainsborough, and joining my companions at the boozing-ken where they had put up, told them what had happened. We then took separate roads, and hastened back to London. There I told Mr. Farefield that I had killed the child, and left it in a place where it was very likely to be discovered. As a proof of the story, I displayed the clothes stripped off the bantling, and which fortunately were marked with the name of the Honourable Edmund Farefield. I also told him about the strawberry mark, and altogether he was satisfied."

Here the Cannibal again paused to refresh himself with more brandy and water, and, having refilled his glass ready for further use, he went on thus:

"A month passed away after the adventure down in Lincolnshire, and as it seemed that nothing was heard about the child, and it did not turn up, I felt pretty sure that either the gipsies had taken it away with them, without stopping

in the neighbourhood to ascertain whose child was lost, or else that they had left it to its fate in the grove. Or again, it likewise occurred to me that they might not have seen it at all. However, certain sure it was that the child continued missing, as I learned from Ralph Farefield, who came to question me more particularly about the business. It was a little more than a month after the adventure, when I one day saw in a newspaper that old Lord Saxondale was lying at the point of death down at the castle in Lincolnshire, so I went off to Mr. Farefield's lodgings to let him know, but I found he had gone down into Lincolnshire the day before. Then it struck me that if the old lord should not happen to die of that bout, it might answer Ralph Farefield's purposes if me and my pals were to get into the castle and knock his venerable lordship on the head in the middle of the night. Away we went, therefore, into Lincolnshire, to offer our services to Ralph in that respect; but on arriving in the neighbourhood we heard that the old lord was dead, that Lady Saxondale had recovered her child, and that Ralph Farefield had gone away suddenly in the middle of the very same night of his arrival. Well, I was not overmuch surprised at hearing that her ladyship had got back the child, knowing what I did about its original loss. I was, however, terribly put out to think that it was all up with Mr. Ralph; so me and my pals consulted what we should do rather than go back empty-handed to London. In short, we determined upon a crack in the castle, and accordingly broke in at night. An alarm was raised, we found our way to some vaults underneath the chapel, and there what do you think we discovered? You would never guess. The dead body of Ralph Farefield, floating about in the water that had flooded the vaults!"

"Had he been murdered, then?" asked Madge Somers, who listened with a deep interest to the narrative.

"There was no appearance of it," responded Chiffin, "and indeed from what a surgeon afterward said, there was every reason to believe the contrary, — I mean to say, that it was an accident by which he was drowned. But how he came into the vault, Heaven only knows. Me and my pals took from about his person all he had in money and jewelry, and left the body lying on the steps leading down into the vault. We then got out of the castle as best

we could, and betook ourselves to Gainsborough, where we put up at the boozing-ken that I mentioned just now, and which was kept by a fellow of the right sort. You recollect I told you that when me and my pals were first down in Lincolnshire about Farefield's business, I sent them to Gainsborough while I tried my hand alone at carrying off the child. On that occasion they put up at the boozing-ken I am speaking about, and there they happened to fall in with a resurrectionist chap, whom they had known in London, and who had been doing a stroke of business at his trade — body-lifting, I mean — down in Lincolnshire. It was to try and find this fellow again that we betook ourselves to the boozing-ken after our adventure inside Saxondale Castle, because at that time the stiff'uns were very scarce in the market and fetched a deuced good price. The laws were very severe then against resurrection-men, and enterprising surgeons who wanted a subject didn't mind giving twenty, thirty, or even forty guineas. Now you begin to understand why me and my pals stopped at Gainsborough to find out Bob Shakerly the body-snatcher. Well, we did succeed in meeting with him, and told him that we knew of where there was a nice stiff'un, pretty fresh, and we thought might be had with a little trouble. So he then told us that there was a young doctor from London stopping in Gainsborough at the moment, of the name of Ferney, and who had quite a mania for subjects. Well, Bob Shakerly went and saw the doctor, and told him what a prize might be had if he chose to give a decent sum for it. This he at once agreed to do, and our arrangements were made accordingly. Me and my pals determined to penetrate once more into the castle and get out the body, for we saw the means of doing it without running any particular risk of discovery. On his side, Bob Shakerly agreed to be in the wood close by the castle with a horse and cart in the middle of the night, and things being thus settled, we set to work without delay. You have never been down in that part of Lincolnshire, have you? "

" No, never," answered Madge.

" Well, Saxondale Castle is an immense building, and at least half of it was shut up in those times," continued the Cannibal. "I don't know anything about it now. All we learned the first time of our breaking in had taught

us how to do things better on this second occasion; so we clambered up to one of the windows that overlooked the River Trent, and got into the uninhabited part that way. We went down into the vaults and found the body just where we had left it lying on the steps. One would have thought the rats must have begun to make a meal upon it, but it was quite otherwise, the stiff'un was as fresh and as perfect as when we dragged it out of the water, two nights before. Well, we got it up the stone stairs into a sort of vestry-place opening out of the chapel. There we put it into one of those precious big sacks that resurrectionists have for the purpose, and lowered it by ropes out of the window by which we had got in. Our own escape was made without exciting any alarm in the building, and we got the stiff'un safe away into the wood, where Bob Shakerly was waiting with a horse and cart. He then drove off to Gainsborough, while me and my pals followed on foot. Doctor Ferney paid the price agreed upon, and though when it came to be divided amongst us all, our shares weren't very great, yet it was a matter of eight pound apiece, and that was better than nothing. Me and my pals came back to London, and sold Ralph Farefield's jewelry to Solomon Patch. So, all things considering, we did not return quite empty-handed."

"And that is all you have to tell me?" observed Madge Somers, as Chiffin the Cannibal left off speaking.

"Yes, that's all, and enough, too, I should think," he answered, with one of his grim smiles. "Wasn't it a precious string of adventures? But, by the bye, I may tell you that the Doctor Ferney I have been speaking about has since become a very celebrated man. Bob Shakerly told me so. Ah! Bob's an old man now, and does nothing in the resurrection line. Subjects have got so precious cheap since the law was altered, and doctors can get hold of poor people that die in hospitals, and workhouse paupers, and convicts. But Bob is doing pretty well, though, in another line; he keeps a knacker's yard down at Cow Cross, Sharp's Alley, I think it is — you must know whereabouts I mean? So, having dug up human bodies for the doctors to dissect, he now buys old horses which he dissects himself for cats' meat and sausages. But it's precious late, Madge, and I think I have had quite enough brandy and water, so I will be off.

But don't forget to be down at Patch's to-morrow night at nine o'clock, or else you and me are very likely to fall out."

" You know that when I promise I always fulfil my undertaking," replied Madge Somers.

"To be sure; I don't doubt you," said Chiffin. "And now good night."

" Good night," answered the woman, and the Cannibal took his departure.

CHAPTER XIV

FRESH ADVENTURES ON THE SAME NIGHT

We left Lord Saxondale at the moment when, having quitted the hut in the precipitate manner already described, he had gained the Seven Sisters Road. It was not in a very lonely part that he now found himself, for Hornsey Wood Tavern was within five minutes' walk in one direction, and ten minutes would bring him to the houses in Hornsey Road in another direction. He thought the best thing he could do would be to proceed to the tavern, knock the people up, and procure a bed for the remainder of the night. But while he paused for a few moments in the middle of the road to reflect whether he should adopt this course, or make the best of his way back into London, his ear caught the quick tramplings of a steed approaching from the direction of the metropolis. Almost immediately afterward the horseman came up to the spot where Saxondale was loitering, and although proceeding at full gallop, he suddenly reined in his steed so that it came to a dead halt.

The reader will remember that it was a clear, starlight night, and Saxondale was therefore enabled to perceive that the stranger who had thus stopped so abruptly had the appearance of a young man very handsomely dressed; but he could see little of his countenance, inasmuch as a great shawl-kerchief, tied around the neck, reached almost up to the nose, while the hat, which had large brims, was drawn low over the forehead. The steed which the traveller bestrode was a magnificent animal, and though evidently docile and obedient to the will of its rider, it nevertheless began pawing the ground with some little degree of impatience at thus being checked in the full career which seemed best suited to its high mettle.

"You are out late to-night, sir," said the horseman, whose voice, though sounding with somewhat muffled accents through the folds of the shawl-neckerchief, was nevertheless mild and agreeable.

"Yes," answered Saxondale, who was just in that frame of mind to be by no means displeased at meeting some one to talk to, after an adventure which had been fraught with so much terror, and the influence of which, still lingering upon his mind, made the road seem more lonely and the silence of the night more ominous than under other circumstances they would have appeared. "But I may make the same observation in respect to you. We are both late. It must be considerably past twelve o'clock," and pulling out his watch, he examined it by the starlight. "Near one, I declare!"

"Which way lies your road?" inquired the traveller, scrutinizing the young nobleman from beneath the overhanging brim of his hat.

"To tell you the truth," answered Saxondale, with a laugh, "I am benighted, as it were, and was just thinking of going up to the tavern yonder and procuring a bed when, as I was crossing the road, you galloped up to the spot."

"It is ten to one that the people will not open their place for you up there at this hour," rejoined the horseman, pointing with his riding-whip toward the tavern upon the neighbouring eminence. "But my house is little more than a mile hence, and if you will condescend to accept such hospitality as I can afford, a bed is cheerfully at your service. I may observe that I have as pretty a little villa-residence farther along the road here, toward Edmonton, as you will see anywhere in this district."

The offer was made with such frank courtesy, and the traveller altogether seemed to be of such genteel and prepossessing appearance, though little of his countenance could be discerned, that Lord Saxondale at once accepted this kind proposal.

"If you like to get up behind me," said the new friend, with still increasing affability of manner, "a few minutes will bring us to our destination, and at this hour of the night it is by no means likely we shall encounter any one to notice the singularity of the proceeding. By the bye," he exclaimed, ere pausing for the young nobleman's answer to this last

proposition, "I ought perhaps to inform you that I am Captain Chandos, of the British army, unattached at present."

"The circumstances under which we have met, and your kindness, Captain Chandos," returned Edmund, "lead me to express a hope that we shall be better acquainted. I am Lord Saxondale, and shall be most happy to return your civility by receiving you in Park Lane."

"I have heard of your lordship," said the captain, "as of course everybody has, and am proud at thus enjoying the honour of your company. Now, my lord, catch hold of my arm, I have left the stirrup free for you, and spring up behind me."

This was immediately done, and now behold Lord Saxondale mounted upon this beautiful high-spirited steed, behind its rider, around whose waist he was of course compelled to throw his arm in order to sustain his balance. Captain Chandos just touched the flanks of the horse with his spurs, and the animal started off at an easy gallop. A little farther on the steed suddenly shied somewhat at a mile-stone which stood out in white and ghastly contrast against the dark hedge, and this little incident, by disturbing Lord Saxondale's equilibrium for a moment, led him to cling all the more tightly to the captain. But he was suddenly seized with a strange feeling of astonishment when his hand encountered a remarkable fulness about the breast of the captain's surtout coat, so that the impression naturally made all in a moment upon Edmund's mind was that his companion must be a woman in disguise. So bewildered was he by this discovery that he knew not what to say or do, and as the steed was galloping along the road toward Edmonton, the young nobleman rapidly experienced the most unpleasant doubts and misgivings springing up within him. At length, when he had made up his mind to turn the matter off in a laugh and inquire "who the fair unknown was that thus in male apparel played the part of Captain Chandos in her Majesty's service," the gallant officer himself — for we had better continue to speak of the rider in the masculine gender — suddenly reined in his steed in the most lonely part of the road and clutching Lord Saxondale by the arm which encircled the slender waist and had been pressing against the telltale bosom, he gave him such a sudden whirl and jerk

that the astounded Edmund was swept clean off the horse and landed upon his feet in the middle of the road.

"Now, my lord," said the audacious captain, suddenly producing a pistol from the holster of his saddle, "your purse, your watch, and those rings from your fingers!"

Lord Saxondale was very far from being the most valorous young man in existence, and the sight of the pistol gleaming in the argentine splendour which poured down from the heavens at once filled him with dismay. He cast an anxious look rapidly up and down the road, but no succour was nigh, nor did a sound of approaching horse or vehicle meet his ears.

"Come, quick, quick!" exclaimed Captain Chandos, the accents of whose voice, though still somewhat muffled by the thick shawl-kerchief, nevertheless sounded peremptory enough. "Keep me not waiting, as you value your life."

"But — but — you are joking, captain — I mean, fair unknown — whoever you are," stammered Saxondale, still with a faint hope that it might prove a frolicsome jest, after all.

"If you keep me talking here another minute you will find it to be no joke, I can assure you," at once rejoined the bold Amazon. "Now, then, my lord, quick! Your purse, and so forth!"

The wretched Saxondale, perceiving that the fair unknown was indeed terribly in earnest, drew forth his purse with trembling hands and craven demeanour. Then he surrendered up his watch, with the gold chain, and lastly he took the rings from his fingers.

"You have handsome diamond studs in your shirt," said the Amazon, "but I will leave you them. I do not wish to strip you altogether," and a merry kind of laugh sounded from behind the muffling shawl-kerchief. "Now, my lord," added the false captain, "I need scarcely enjoin you to hold your tongue relative to the adventure you have just experienced, for your pride will prevent you from proclaiming to the whole world that you have been robbed by a woman."

With these words the female highwayman put spurs to her steed, which started away at full gallop, and in a few moments the Amazonian desperado disappeared in the distance.

Discomfited, abashed, and devoured with shame, young Lord Saxondale stood transfixed to the spot in most wretched

bewilderment. The spiteful elements of his character being aroused, he gnashed his teeth with impotent rage, and then he actually shed tears of vexation and annoyance. There he was, at a considerable distance from London, penniless, at an advanced hour of the night, or, rather, an early one of the morning, and so exhausted with fatigue that he trembled at the idea of the long walk which seemed before him. The whole night's adventures had been but too well calculated to terrify, harass, weary, and humiliate him. First startled up from a very short sleep, compelled to dress in haste and go forth to look for a bed elsewhere, then taken at least another mile out of his way, to be plundered and put to shame by a female in masculine attire, and now left to manage as best he could for the remainder of the night, — these were the unpleasant topics of Lord Saxondale's reflections.

However, he must not only put the best face on the matter, but also the best foot foremost. Full truly indeed had the female highwayman observed, with a mocking laugh, that he would only be too anxious to keep the adventure as close as possible within his own breast, for were it to transpire that he had suffered himself to be thus despoiled of his purse, his watch, and his rings, by a woman, he would be so unmercifully laughed at as to be ashamed ever to show his face in society again. Therefore, as to keeping his own counsel relative to the robbery, his mind was made up in a moment, and with regard to his present predicament, the only alternative was to get back into London as best he could. So he walked on toward the Seven Sisters Road again, which he soon reached. In a little while he paused at the corner of the narrow lane leading up to Hornsey Wood Tavern, but recollecting that he had not a farthing in his pocket, he dared not bend his steps thither to knock the people up. He accordingly walked on, and in another quarter of an hour arrived opposite Evergreen Villa, which he could not help regarding as the origin, so to speak, of all his manifold adventures and misfortunes of this night. Indeed, so thoroughly sickened, dispirited, depressed, and humiliated did he feel — so thoroughly wretched too in every sense of the word — that as he stood gazing upon Evergreen Villa for a few moments, he was almost inclined to make a vow that he would abandon his previously enthusiastic designs in that quarter.

But while he thus paused opposite Evergreen Villa, he suddenly observed through the somewhat thick screen of trees in the front garden a light glimmering from one of the windows on the ground floor. To the best of his calculations (for he had no watch to refer to) it was now nearly two o'clock in the morning.

"Monday night," he said to himself, thus musingly refreshing his memory, "and Angela Vivaldi was not advertised to dance, so they cannot be sitting up for her to return from the opera. Besides, she would be home before this. And yet why should she not have been out at some party?" and as these reflections swept through his brain he suddenly experienced some little revival of his passion for the fair *danseuse.*

As he still lingered hesitatingly in front of the villa, he heard a door open, and then a much stronger light suddenly shone from behind the screen of trees. He advanced up to the gate opening from the foot-path, and perceived a female descending the steps of the front door, which stood wide open and whence the light of the hall-lamp was streaming forth. The female had the appearance of being a lady's-maid, or domestic of a similarly superior grade, and as she came slowly along the gravel walk leading toward the gate, Saxondale had an opportunity of observing that she was young, rather good-looking, dressed with a coquettish gaiety, and having the arch mischievous look of a confidential soubrette.

Here suddenly seemed to be an opportunity of doing for himself all that the old woman had undertaken to perform, but in which she had so grossly and unaccountably deceived him; and feeling his spirits somewhat revive by the hopefulness of the occurrence which was thus transpiring, he waited in the shade of the trees near the gate until the lady's-maid, as he presumed her to be, came near enough for him to address her. Then she stopped, and seemed to listen as if in expectation of some one's approach.

"Well, my pretty maid," said Lord Saxondale, suddenly showing himself, "you are taking a late walk in the garden here."

"Oh, dear! how you have startled me," exclaimed the abigail, with a half-suppressed shriek, but as she immediately perceived that the cause of her more than half-affected alarm

was evidently a gentleman by his dress, the self-sufficiency of his speech, and the diamond studs which gleamed in the starlight, she did not see any necessity for hurrying away from the spot; on the contrary, advancing close up to the gate, she rather appeared to court the little chat which accident thus threw in her way.

"What are you doing out here so late?" asked Lord Saxondale.

"Well, it's like your impudence to question me in this manner," said the young woman, with an arch toss of her head, though evidently being very far from offended. "And suppose I was to ask how it is you are out so late?"

"Well, then, I should at once tell you," returned Saxondale. "I have been dining up at the tavern yonder, with a parcel of friends of mine, and we have swallowed no small quantity of wine. Then we had cards and dice, and if I had not lost a matter of three or four hundred guineas, I should at once slip a ten-pound note into your hand as an earnest of future rewards if you lend me your aid in a certain enterprise I have in view."

"Oh, I am sure you must indeed have been drinking a great deal of wine to talk to me in this way," said the lady's-maid, with an affected giggle, which showed that if Lord Saxondale were really earnest in what he said he was at perfect liberty to go on and explain himself without the fear of giving offence.

"I can assure you that I speak the truth," he immediately rejoined. "But though I have lost all my money at cards, as I tell you, there is nothing to prevent me from coming up to this neighbourhood to-morrow and making it twenty guineas instead of ten, that I design as a little present for your acceptance."

"Oh, yes, I dare say! It is all very pretty to talk in this manner," cried the maid, with another laugh, as if she pretended to regard his behaviour only as a mere pleasantry. "But I should like to know in the first place who you are, that you speak so fine and make such magnificent promises?"

The young nobleman had not been despoiled of his card-case by the female highwayman. He accordingly took it forth from his pocket, and, producing one of its pasteboard contents, handed the same to the lady's-maid, who was

enabled by the clearness of the night to read the name upon it.

" Well, my lord," she said, with a somewhat more respectful tone, — though all along her manner had been affably familiar and flippantly gracious enough, — " I of course begin to believe that you are serious in what you have said, for of course a gentleman never breaks a promise, and a lord is more than a gentleman."

" Now, tell me who you are waiting for? " said the young nobleman.

" For my mistress, whom I expect home every minute," was the reply. " I got so tired of waiting that I came out, hoping to hear the sounds of the carriage-wheels. And, by the bye, the moment we do catch them, your lordship must hasten away."

" Would your mistress chide you for speaking to me? " asked Saxondale.

" I don't exactly know that she would, for she is indulgent enough," was the response, " but at the same time if any one came home with her, it would look so odd for me to be seen talking to a gentleman at the gate. Besides — "

" Besides what? " inquired Saxondale, as the soubrette suddenly stopped short. " Tell me, what were you about to say? "

" Oh, nothing," rejoined the young woman, with an arch smile through the bars of the gate. " Only — "

" Only what? You have got something at the very tip of your tongue and do not like to say it."

" Well, my lord, I am speaking to a stranger," returned the young woman, somewhat more seriously than before, " and of course I do not like to gossip about my mistress's affairs to everybody."

" Your mistress belongs to the opera? " observed Saxondale.

" Ah, then you know something about her? " at once exclaimed the soubrette. " And now I remember your lordship did say something about entertaining certain views and requiring my assistance. Was that said for fun or in earnest? "

" Quite in earnest," answered Saxondale, " and it was for that purpose I promised you a reward. Indeed, if I had not been robbed — "

"Robbed! I thought you had lost your money at cards?"

"To be sure, I said so. But cannot a person be robbed at cards as well as on the highway?"

"Certainly. However, I have your lordship's promise for a proof of your kindness, and as I consider your word to be your bond, I am just as ready to listen to what your lordship has to say as if I had the gift in my pocket."

"From something that has escaped my lips," resumed Edmund, "you have seen that I know a little about your mistress. I have seen her at the opera, and to see is to admire. But there is still another step which is to be explained by stating that to admire is to burn to possess. Now, in plain terms, is there anything to hope?"

"It all depends, my lord," replied the soubrette.

"Depends upon what?" inquired Saxondale.

"Terms, offers, settlements, and so forth," was the answer.

"Then, is your mistress mercenary?"

"Not exactly mercenary, but she loves money, just as a great many other ladies do, as a means of procuring pleasure, to live in good style, keep her carriage and servants, and so forth, all of which she could not do with her salary at the opera."

"And yet she is handsomely paid, according to report," remarked Edmund.

"Not so well as people think, perhaps," rejoined the soubrette. "But you asked me if there were any hope. It is for you to get acquainted with my mistress, and see what she says. You do not seem too bashful, my lord, in making known your wishes, and certainly she will not be too bashful in giving you an answer. Of course I shall say everything I can in your favour, and you know that a lady's-maid in these cases possesses great influence with her mistress."

"Undoubtedly. You are her lady's-maid then? I thought so the very first moment I saw you. One can always tell a lady's-maid."

"Yes, we have a certain air," remarked the young woman, tossing her head conceitedly. "But why, my lord, do you not come and call to-morrow, or else write a very tender and affectionate billet?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Saxondale, "is it possible that your mistress would either receive me as a visitor with-

out any introduction, or take notice of any letter I might send her?"

"Well, considering that you are a lord," responded the soubrette, slyly, and with a sort of mysterious confidence, "I think it very probable my mistress might dispense with the usual formalities. Indeed, if she were to come home alone presently, I am not quite sure but that you might be pardoned for your boldness in introducing yourself to her at once."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Edmund, now so elated that he forgot all the previous misadventures of the night.

"It is so possible," was the response, "that I should advise you to make the attempt. Or if you are too bashful, you can just walk a little way up the road and leave me to say a few words to my mistress. Then, if I were to come down to the gate and ask you to walk in and take supper with her, for she always has supper when she comes home, and it is now ready served in the drawing-room — "

"If you are not trifling with me," exclaimed Edmund, "and if you could really manage what you have just proposed it should not be merely twenty guineas that I would put into your hand to-morrow, but fifty."

"Well, my lord," answered the soubrette, "it all depends upon whether a certain person comes home presently with my mistress. And that, to tell you the truth, was what I alluded to just now when you told me I had something at the tip of my tongue that I did not like to speak out."

"But who is this certain person?" inquired Saxondale.

"Mr. Walter, at the opera."

"What, one of the great authorities of the establishment?" ejaculated Saxondale. "Oh, I know him tolerably well. I have frequently spoken to him behind the scenes, — a stout, elderly gentleman."

"The same," responded the soubrette. "He's a nice enough man in his way, but very particular indeed; and that was why I was fearful that if he did come home presently with my mistress, he would be angry on finding me talking to any one at the gate. Oh, he is so particular," repeated the abigail, "and treats my mistress just as if she were his wife, hands her in and out of her carriage with the greatest respect — "

"But what, then, has he to do with your mistress?" demanded Saxondale. "Is he related to her?"

"Oh, my lord, how stupid you are! Can't you guess?" Then, with another sly look, and once more in a mysterious tone of confidence, the soubrette added, "He is just as much related to her as your lordship wishes to be."

"Do you mean to tell me she is living under his protection?" demanded Edmund, in astonishment.

The soubrette nodded her head affirmatively.

"Oh, the sly puss!" ejaculated Saxondale, "and rumour speaks so highly of her virtue! Well, after all, I was right," he observed, musing audibly, "in what I said to my friend Staunton, when I declared that I had no great opinion of the virtue of any female upon the stage. But still I did think that she was virtuous as yet, although I fancied that her virtue was not an impregnable citadel. And you tell me," he continued, again addressing himself to the soubrette, "that your mistress is living under the protection of this Mr. Walter?"

"Yes. Is there anything astonishing in it?"

"Oh, nothing at all. But is she much attached to him?"

"No, far from it; and between you and me, my lord, the conquest will not prove altogether so difficult as you may fancy. But here she comes. Hasten away for a few minutes."

Lord Saxondale, whose ear had suddenly caught the sounds of an approaching vehicle at the same time as the lady's-maid's, at once acted in obedience to her suggestion, and hurried higher up the road. Then stopping and looking back, he perceived a brougham drive up to the gate of the villa garden. The lady's-maid immediately issued forth, the coachman leaped down, and one person only emerged from the carriage. That person was a female, and she at once entered the precincts of Evergreen Villa.

"Now, then," thought Saxondale to himself, as he experienced a thrilling exultation of the heart, "it is about ten to one that within a very few minutes I shall have the happiness of being in the presence of Signora Vivaldi. That soubrette of hers is an artful hussy, and is pretty sure to manage the business cleverly. Ah! now the coachman takes the vehicle around to the stables. I wonder how long I shall have to wait here. Perhaps the maid is already

opening the matter to her mistress. But if the world only knew what I have discovered to-night, — that the beautiful Angela Vivaldi, whose virtue has been paraded off as immaculate as her loveliness is transcending, is nothing more or less than the kept mistress of one of the great dons of the opera, what casting up of eyes, and holding up of hands, and lifting up of voices there would be! Well, after all, it will be a conquest of its kind, because I know she has refused so many offers and has treated so many letters with contemptuous silence. And yet, if she should all of a sudden receive me into favour, it will be rather astonishing. But the soubrette spoke confidently enough. Ah, I know what it must be! This signora has her pride, and has refused two or three marquises, four or five earls, and a whole score of barons, just because they were not of ancient family; and I presume that cunning soubrette, knowing that I am descended from ancestors who lived in the time of the Tudors, is very well aware beforehand that her mistress will not say nay to me."

In these and similar musings did half an hour pass, while the conceited young nobleman was kicking his heels to and fro in the road. At length he became uneasy. Was it possible that the lady's-maid had been laughing in her sleeve at him the whole time? He began to fear so. But if it were the case, would it not add the crowning ignominy to all the previous humiliations of this memorable night? Saxondale was rapidly falling into despondency. But ah! the front door of the villa opens, a female form trips forth and speeds down to the gate! With hope suddenly reviving, — not merely reviving, but soaring up into exultation, — Lord Saxondale hurries thither, and the first glance he obtains of the lady's-maid's countenance is the harbinger of happiness.

"Well, what news have you for me?" he impatiently asked.

"Let this be the reply," responded the soubrette, and she opened the gate.

Edmund hastened in, the young woman shut the gate, and hurriedly conducted him into the hall. There, as she closed the front door, she threw upon him a look full of arch meaning, and whispered, "Did I not tell you that I should succeed? Did I not promise a triumph?"

Lord Saxondale could scarcely retain his joy as he breathed the most liberal promises in the ears of the young woman.

"Walk in, my lord," she said, throwing open a door leading out of the hall. "My mistress will be with you immediately. She is merely making some change in her toilet."

Saxondale entered an apartment that was not merely elegantly, but even luxuriously furnished. A table in the centre was spread with a supper consisting of several cold dainties and choice wines. The curtains had been drawn closely over the windows, and the room was lighted by a lustre suspended from the ceiling.

"Now," thought Lord Saxondale to himself, "in a few minutes, perhaps in a few seconds, I shall have an opportunity of gazing close upon those charms which I have already devoured from a distance. But hers is a loveliness which cannot diminish by a near view. Ah, what happiness!" and he literally rubbed his hands with delight.

At this moment he heard female voices whispering in the hall. Then the door opened, and then a lady of tall stature, great beauty, and elastic walk entered the room. She was clad in an elegant wrapper thrown loosely around her; and in her appearance there was not merely that negligent abandonment of one who has just put on a *déshabillé*, but also a meretricious exposure of her charms.

She was not the Signora Vivaldi, and therefore Lord Saxondale at once took her to be either a guest or a relation of a fair *danseuse*. He accordingly bowed with the politest courtesy, but volunteered no explanation of his object in obtaining this interview.

"Your lordship will doubtless think me very indiscreet and very imprudent," said the lady, motioning him to be seated, as she threw herself listlessly upon a sofa placed near the supper-table, "in receiving you at this time of night, or, rather, I should say, at so early an hour in the morning; but from all that my maid told me of your lordship's anxiety to form my acquaintance, I was vain enough to suppose — "

"Your maid?" echoed Lord Saxondale, with unfeigned astonishment. "Surely there must be some mistake? It was the fair mistress of the villa to whom I was desirous of paying my respects."

"And I, my lord," answered the lady, reddening with

mingled indignation and wounded pride, "am the mistress of the villa. If your lordship is disappointed, and expected to meet some other person, your lordship can retire. It was not I who sought this interview, and therefore the humiliation of the mistake will not rest with me."

"Do not be angry, I beseech you," cried Saxondale, scarcely recovering from his bewilderment. "It is true that I had been led to imagine another lady lived here, but the one in whose presence I have the honour to find myself is so charming a substitute that it is, as it were, only finding myself in one part of Paradise when I had fancied that I was being led to another."

"Your lordship, at all events, has the art of turning a compliment most prettily," said the young lady, smiling so as to reveal a set of very beautiful teeth. "But pray whom did you expect to meet here on the present occasion?"

"To tell you the truth, it was the Signora Vivaldi," answered Saxondale.

"Oh, the prude!" instantaneously cried the fair one, with an indignant toss of the head. "But I begin to understand how this mistake originated. It is doubtless because I also belonging to the opera —"

"Just so!" exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "And now tell me at whose feet I have the honour of kneeling?" he added, suiting the action to the word, and dropping down upon his knees before the lady, whose hand he took and pressed to his lips.

"You may know me as Emily Archer, if you like," was the response, accompanied by a sweet, seductive smile, "but at the opera and to the world I am known as Mademoiselle d'Alembert."

"Oh, then, if I have lost one beautiful *danseuse*, I have obtained another," exclaimed Edmund, as he again pressed her hand to his lips. Then rising from his knees and seating himself by her side, he said, "How foolish in me not to have recognized you at once! I have often admired you, and between ourselves considered you a much finer *artiste* than the Signora Vivaldi."

"Ah! my dear Lord Saxondale," exclaimed Miss Archer, "it is only jealousy and bad taste and envy and want of discernment and all kinds of nasty feelings that have put me

second instead of first. But come, let us take some supper, and a glass of champagne will enliven our discourse."

Lord Saxondale and the meretricious beauty of the opera-ballet accordingly placed themselves at table; and by the time the young nobleman had imbibed his third glass of champagne he had not merely forgotten the beautiful Angela altogether, but found himself breathing the most extravagant proposals in the ears of the seductive Emily Archer.

CHAPTER XV

THE GRAND ENTERTAINMENT

Turn we now to the residence of Lady Macdonald, in Cavendish Square.

It was six o'clock in the evening of the day that followed the night of Lord Saxondale's many adventures, and Lady Florina Staunton was seated in her own private apartment adjoining her bedchamber. The room was splendidly furnished, and the ornaments were of a character which displayed the refined taste of its presiding divinity. Several exquisite alabaster statues were dispersed about, there were vases filled with flowers which exhaled a delicious perfume, and on a side-table were scattered drawing materials, with a few exquisite specimens of the art in water-colour.

Florina was dressed for a party. Her beautiful hair was arranged in ringlets, and ornamented with pearls and a single camelia that seemed typical of her own virgin purity. She was seated at a table, whereon lay a book and a letter, both of which she had been reading. The former was a volume of Scott's Poems, of which she was a great admirer. The letter was one that had been received by her aunt that same afternoon from Mr. Gunthorpe, and which had been given to our fair heroine to read.

But at the moment when we thus afford the reader a glimpse into that splendidly furnished apartment, Lady Florina was neither reading book nor letter, but was plunged into a deep reverie. Exquisitely beautiful did she seem as she sat, statue-like, in her rich dress and with her looks bent pensively downwards, — so exquisitely beautiful, indeed, that it appeared a sin to allow the heart of so fair a creature to experience the slightest source of vexation or sorrow. And yet sorrow did lurk in that gentle bosom of hers, for the

young lady could not blind herself to the circumstance that, in being regarded as the future wife of Lord Saxondale, she was to be sacrificed to the wretched conventionalisms of high life, and that her hand was to be bestowed upon one whom she could not possibly love, and who even inspired her with aversion and disgust. But there was another circumstance to which Florina could not close her convictions, and this was, that if she did not love Lord Saxondale she nevertheless loved another.

"Yes," she thought to herself, in the depth of that reverie in which we find her plunged, "he is one of nature's true aristocracy and needs no factitious ornament of rank or accidental advantage of fortune to render him truly estimable. I feel that I love him. I can no longer shut out this truth from my mind. But in thus admitting it unto myself, is it not the same as acknowledging my own unhappiness? Alas, yes! for it is in vain that I love him — I never can be his. Oh, that he loves me in return, I know, I am convinced. Yes, William Deveril loves me," and as she thus spoke his name even to herself, she suddenly started as if with the consciousness of some guilty thought or deed. "And now," she continued, in her silent reverie, "I am decked to go forth into the brilliant saloons of fashion, to smile with my lips while my heart is weeping, to look happy in my face while my soul is dark with sorrow."

At this moment a door opened at the extremity of Lady Florina's apartment, and galvanized, as it were, from her deep, absorbing reverie, she started and looked around, as if fearful lest the person now entering, whoever it were, might read in her features the thoughts that had been agitating in her mind.

"Ah, my dear aunt," she exclaimed, rising from her chair, "is the carriage at the door?"

"Yes, Flo dear," responded Lady Macdonald, an elderly woman, superbly dressed, but the artifices of whose toilet could not conceal and scarcely even mitigate the ravages of time upon a beauty that in her younger days had been of no common order. "It is half-past six, Lady Saxondale dines at seven, and you know that she is so particular, she is always punctual."

"I am ready, aunt," replied Florina. "But surely it will not take half an hour," she added, smiling, "to reach Park

Lane, and I know that you do not like to be there much before the time."

"True," observed Lady Macdonald, "we will wait five minutes. Have you read Mr. Gunthorpe's letter which I sent in to you just now?"

"I have read it, with some degree of astonishment," answered Florina. "The other night, when he first introduced himself to me and Harold at the opera, he said that he should be delighted to pay you a visit, and I assured him that you would be well pleased to show him every attention. And now," added Florina, taking up the letter from the table and glancing her eyes over it, "he says that his numerous occupations in the City and the attention which he has to devote to certain business matters have compelled him to decide upon resigning for the present the advantages he would otherwise have been delighted to reap from Uncle Eagledean's letters of introduction. He dined with Harold the other day," added Florina, speaking hesitatingly, "and I do hope that my brother treated him with civility."

"Mr. Gunthorpe appears to be a singular kind of person," remarked Lady Macdonald. "However, he can act as he pleases. By the bye, talking of Harold, is he to be at Saxondale House this evening?"

"I believe so," responded Florina, "but I have not seen him to-day."

"And Edmund, has he called?" asked Lady Macdonald.

"He has not been here since Saturday, when he came with Harold to take me to the opera."

"What, and this is Tuesday evening!" exclaimed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of vexation. "Three whole days without coming to pay his respects to you! That is rather too bad — And yet," she immediately added, "it is nothing in high life. The sphere in which we move is in many respects different from the other grades of society in its usages and customs."

"Then I wish that I had been born in another sphere," observed Florina, in the lowest and most melting accents of her fluid voice.

"Niece, I do not like remarks of this kind," exclaimed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of remonstrance.

"But, my dear aunt," replied the gentle girl, "surely

the satisfaction of expressing my fanciful wishes is left to me, even though all other power of free-will be denied."

"What means this language, niece?" demanded Lady Macdonald. "Ah, I understand. It is one of those covert reproaches which you sometimes throw out against me, for having studied your best possible interests by arranging with Lady Saxondale that her son was to become your accepted suitor. I hope that you will not prove ungrateful."

"Ungrateful! No, not to you, my dear aunt," cried the young lady, approaching her elderly relative and looking affectionately up into her countenance. "To me you have supplied the place of a lost mother, and I know that all you do is done for the best. Still —"

"Hush, my dear child," exclaimed Lady Macdonald, who really loved her niece, "I know what you would say. You would tell me the old story, — that you cannot love Edmund; but in the sphere in which we move," continued her ladyship, making use of a phrase which was a great favourite with her, "love has very little to do with marriages. If I had a fortune to leave you, my dear girl, it would be different; but as all I possess dies with me, it was absolutely necessary for me to think of settling you well in life, and with all his faults Lord Saxondale is a very eligible match. Besides, these faults of his are only the invariable frolics of youth, and it is better that he should sow his wild oats when young, before he marries, so that after he does marry he may settle down into a steady and quiet husband. But while we are talking here the time is slipping away, and we must be off."

Lady Macdonald and her niece thereupon descended to the carriage that was waiting, and in which they were borne to Park Lane. On arriving at Saxondale House, they were conducted up-stairs to the magnificent drawing-room, where Lady Saxondale, with her two daughters, was waiting to receive her guests. Her ladyship was sumptuously apparelled, and looked as if invested with a perfectly imperial dignity. Juliana, the elder daughter, likewise shone in the glory of that proud and haughty beauty which she inherited from her mother, while the delicate and interesting loveliness of Constance appeared to greater advantage by the contrast.

"Where is Edmund?" asked Lady Macdonald, when the usual greetings had been exchanged on all sides.

"I expect him every moment. I should hope that he will not fail to make his appearance," responded Lady Saxondale, a cloud lowering upon her grandly handsome countenance, as if she felt that it was too bad for her son not to be there already. "He knows that there is a dinner-party this evening —"

Her ladyship's sentence was interrupted by the opening of the door, and Lord Petersfield was announced. This was one of Edmund's guardians, and was therefore received with very great attention and extreme politeness by Lady Saxondale. He was an old man, stout, but not exactly corpulent, tall and stately, and dignified even to solemn pomposity both in his manner and speech. He was a diplomatist, and had been ambassador to several of the principal European courts, but for certain political reasons, which it is not worth while to enter into here, he at present held no office, although the party to which he belonged was at the time in power. The most common observer could not be five minutes in his company without discovering him to be a diplomatist, though previously uninformed of the fact; for Lord Petersfield never spoke a word that was not duly measured, and scarcely ventured to perform the most trivial action without appearing to reflect whether it were a wise one or not.

Ever invested with that solemn and indeed awful air of gravity which he had contracted during a long career in diplomacy, Lord Petersfield constantly looked as if the weight of the whole world's affairs were upon his shoulders, and that the slightest unguarded word would plunge them into ruin. Sometimes, if he could not make up his mind what answer to give to even the most trivial question put to him, he would remain scrupulously silent. Thus, if anybody observed that "the weather was very fine," and Lord Petersfield on casting his eyes upwards beheld the least cloud upon the heavens, he would prudently shut himself up in a solemn silence rather than stand the chance of compromising his judgment by admitting that it was fine when it was just possible to rain. If his opinion were asked upon any passing event or current topic, he was very seldom able to bring his mind to give an immediate response. He was not aware, he had not thought upon, or it was a subject that required the deepest consideration. If he were met

in the street proceeding to his club or to the House of Lords, and being asked whither he was going, he would not immediately reply. It was possible he might be on his way to the one place or the other, but he would not pledge himself to the fact; he would rather not compromise himself by the assurance that it was so, — many things might happen in the interval.

Indeed, Lord Petersfield had a holy abhorrence of all downright questions, and never could give a prompt or straightforward answer. He even once, when accosted at a party and asked if he were not Lord Petersfield, looked positively dismayed at such a pointed question, replying that he did not exactly know, he had not considered upon it, he would rather not compromise himself, he might be Lord Petersfield, it was possible, but still no man ought to be called upon to answer in a hurry a query of such grave personal importance. Nay, it was even whispered that when his lordship (who married late in life) conducted his intended to the altar, and was asked "whether he would take that woman to be his wife," his countenance grew awfully grave and his looks profoundly solemn, while he assured the clergyman that he was not prepared to speak decidedly upon the point, he did not like to compromise himself, and had a very particular aversion to such pointed queries.

Such was Lord Petersfield, one of Lady Saxondale's guests on the occasion on which we are writing. Mr. Marlow, Edmund's other guardian (of the firm of Marlow and Malton), was also invited, and a very different person he was from his colleague in the trusteeship. For precisely as Lord Petersfield was slow, pompous, and heavy, was the solicitor quick in action, glib in speech, and volatile in motion. When the door was thrown open and his name was announced, he rushed in all in a flurry, just as if he were late for an important case coming on before the judges at Westminster, and in the space of three minutes he would talk more than Lord Petersfield ever spoke in three years.

A quick succession of guests soon followed the arrival of Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow, —lords and ladies, right honourables and honourables, in short, a brilliant company to the number of fifty, for this was a very grand dinner-party that Lady Saxondale was giving on the present

occasion. Lord Harold was amongst the guests, but it was not till the very last minute, and just as Lady Saxondale was beginning to despair, that Edmund made his appearance.

It was now just five minutes past seven o'clock, and Lady Saxondale, who liked to be very punctual, felt happy as she glanced around, and rapidly counting to herself all the guests who were present, saw that their number was complete. That elegant-looking page whom we have especially noticed in a preceding chapter now entered the room, and gliding noiselessly over the thick carpet, approached his noble mistress, who, fancying that he came merely to receive the usual order to serve dinner up at once, nodded in a significant manner to that effect. But it appeared that the page's object in accosting Lady Saxondale at the moment was of another kind, for he bent down and whispered, " Please, my lady, a woman is waiting in the hall to speak to your ladyship upon very important business."

" Did you not give her a proper answer? " asked Lady Saxondale, in a low tone, but with an angry look, as if she thought the page had not done his duty.

" I assured the woman," was the whispered response, " that your ladyship would see no one now; but she desired me to say that she must have an interview, if only for a minute, without delay, too, for she has got to be quite at the other end of London by nine o'clock. Please, my lady, those are the woman's own words."

Lady Saxondale seemed struck by an astonishment not unmingled with dismay at this intelligence, and for a moment she hesitated how to act, murmuring to herself, " Who can it possibly be? " Then suddenly making up her mind, she said, " Go and show the woman into the parlour downstairs, and I will come to her in a moment."

None of the guests overheard this rapid and brief colloquy between her ladyship and the page, nor was the emotion of the former, on receiving so insolent a message, observed by any one present in the drawing-room, save her elder daughter, Juliana, and this young lady's attention was only drawn to the incident by the circumstance that from under her long eyelashes she was bending stealthy and sidelong glances toward the beautiful page the whole time that he was in

the room. Thus was it that Juliana was led to observe that something had transpired to vex and alarm her mother, but though suddenly animated with a deep curiosity to learn what it was, she did not dare follow her parent from the room for the purpose.

Lady Saxondale, with a gracious apology to those guests who were seated near her for her being compelled to leave them for an instant, quitted the apartment, and proceeded down-stairs to the room where the obtrusive visitress was waiting to see her. Her ladyship remained absent for about a quarter of an hour, during which interval Juliana was puzzling herself to conjecture what on earth it could be that had thus evidently troubled her mother. At the expiration of that time Lady Saxondale returned to the drawing-room, and still from beneath her long, dark lashes did Juliana intently watch her mother's countenance. She at once saw that it was pale, and bore the traces of very recent agitation, an agitation, too, which was evidently still heaving within her ladyship's bosom, but all outward appearance of which she was endeavouring with a mighty effort to conceal. Returning to her seat, she at once entered with high-bred ease and graceful courtesy into the topic of the conversation that was going on around her, but in the tones of her mother's voice the keen and cunning Juliana perceived the evidences of that inward trouble which she had already observed reflected in her looks.

Dinner was announced, and the aristocratic throng proceeded to the banqueting-room, which presented a magnificent appearance to the eye. It was completely flooded with the dazzling light shed from two lustres each containing at least forty wax candles, the table literally groaned beneath the massive services of plate, and twenty domestics in gorgeous liveries were in attendance. The dinner passed off as all such banquets in high life usually do, that is to say, heavily, all real enthusiasm of feeling and true sense of enjoyment being weighed down and chilled by the petrifying influence of formality. Lord Petersfield was, if possible, more reserved, guarded, and cautious in all he said and did than ever, and his air of diplomacy hung about him with a truly awful effect. When asked which soup he would prefer, he gave the domestic such an overwhelming gaze that the unfortunate footman wished the floor would open

and swallow him up; but when pointedly asked by Lady Saxondale which part of the turbot he preferred, he looked as if he thought there was a design to entrap him into some snare or take an advantage of him. In this way his lordship helped to render the ceremonials of the dinner-table more coldly ceremonious still, and the formalities more icily formal. As for Lady Saxondale, she did the honours of the table with the dignified grace and well-bred courtesy becoming her rank, and also her position as mistress of the house; but despite all her efforts to throw a veil over the thoughts that were agitating within her brain, there were nevertheless moments when the keen eye of Juliana could detect a sudden expression of anguish flitting over her mother's proud countenance, and she likewise noticed the almost preterhuman effort which on those occasions her ladyship exerted to rise dominant, as it were, above the internal agony that was torturing her. More than ever, therefore, was Juliana's curiosity excited, and in the secret depths of her own mind did she resolve by some means or another to penetrate the mystery.

It was not till past nine o'clock that the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, and the gentlemen were left at table to drink a few more glasses of wine ere summoned to partake of coffee. Thank Heaven, the disgusting and bestial system of sitting for hours over the wine, after the ladies have retired, has of late years been rapidly falling into desuetude, English habits in this respect yielding to the civilizing influences of French examples. But still, at dinner-parties, the gentlemen persist in remaining a little while to enjoy a jovial glass until coffee be served up in the drawing-room, and so it was upon the present occasion. Mr. Marlow, glad to be relieved from the shackles of those formalities which had hitherto prevailed, began to rattle away with his wonted volubility, and quite alarmed Lord Petersfield by suddenly asking that nobleman which his lordship preferred, generally speaking, the French or Rhenish wines. The cautious diplomatist gave Mr. Marlow an awful look, as if he shrewdly suspected the cunning lawyer meant to take some advantage of him by so pointed a question. Then, in grave and solemn tones, he announced that it was a subject which, considering the rival interests that existed in respect to wines between France and Germany, he could not possibly

be expected to give an opinion upon, until he had examined all the most recent Parliamentary documents bearing on the point. Indeed, his lordship more than hinted that the very stability of existing treaties might be jeopardized by hazarding too rash an opinion on such a grave and important subject.

Lord Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton, who had hitherto been separated during the dinner, now took advantage of the comparative freedom which the withdrawal of the ladies permitted, and getting together, they began to chat in a low tone upon affairs interesting only to themselves.

"Well, how have you got on with the beauteous Angela?" asked Lord Harold.

"Not at all," was the response. "But such an adventure! I cannot tell it you all now. Your valet Alfred, despite his cleverness, was quite wrong —"

"What do you mean? Did he not put you on the true scent?"

"At this very moment," returned Saxondale, "I am as ignorant as ever I was of the abode of Signora Vivaldi."

"Then she does not live at the place to which Alfred followed her?" observed Lord Harold, with unfeigned surprise.

"It was not she whom Alfred followed at all. But mind, it was not poor Alfred's fault, and so I do not blame him. The lady whom he did follow is just of the same height as Angela, and when wrapped up in a cloak and veiled, might in the hurry of the moment be easily taken for the signora."

"Then who in Heaven's name was she?" asked Staunton, scarcely knowing whether to believe his young friend's story or not.

"You know, at least by sight, Mademoiselle d'Alembert?"

"What, Emily Archer? Of course I do, and so do a dozen others."

"Isn't she a splendid creature?" asked Saxondale, his ear not having caught Staunton's last words nor his eye having noticed the somewhat sarcastic smile which appeared on his friend's lip. "Having been disappointed in my hope of meeting Angela, it was an immense consolation to fall in with Emily Archer as a substitute. Well, to be brief, she and I have made certain arrangements together, and

this morning, after breakfast, she wrote the prettiest, sweetest, and genteelest little billet in the world, telling her friend Mr. Walter that she thanked him for all past kindnesses, but was compelled by circumstances to give him his dismissal.

" Then you have taken her under your protection? " asked Staunton, and as Saxondale nodded an affirmative, he immediately added, " Of course you have abandoned your love-campaign in respect to Signora Vivaldi? "

" Oh, certainly. Miss Archer stipulated that as one of the conditions."

" And therefore you will not consider it treacherous or unfair on my part if I take up the pursuit which you have thus renounced? " continued Staunton.

" By all means do so," rejoined Edmund. " I am so well pleased with Miss Emily that it is with no great pang I abandon my hopes of the signora. And now I wish you good luck in the affair you are taking in hand."

There was a passing smile upon Lord Harold's countenance, which seemed to imply that he thought Edmund a very great fool for his pains; but as at this moment Lord Petersfield addressed some particular question to Saxondale, the latter did not notice Staunton's look.

Soon afterward the gentlemen proceeded to the drawing-room, where coffee was served around; and then the whole magnificent suite of state apartments was thrown open for the dance. Carriages kept rolling up to the doors of Saxondale House, depositing their aristocratic burdens, and then rushing away again to make room for fresh arrivals, so that by ten o'clock the brilliantly lighted rooms were thronged with an almost countless company, and a splendid band being in attendance, the alternate quadrille and waltz soon sounded most inspiritingly throughout the mansion.

Lady Saxondale performed the part of a hostess with that dignified but quiet air which belongs to high breeding, and truly magnificent did she appear with her grand beauty set off by all the advantages of a superb toilet. The white ostrich plumes waved gracefully above the head which she carried with a statuesque elegance slightly commingled with hauteur, and no one who now gazed upon that proudly handsome countenance would have for a moment fancied that its serene dignity was but a mask veiling the inward

troubles of the soul. In a suite of apartments thronged with splendid specimens of the female sex, Lady Saxondale was assuredly the most superb. There were others more sweetly and interestingly beautiful, such, for example, as the captivating Lady Florina Staunton, or even Lady Saxondale's younger daughter Constance, but there was not one who in Juno-like majesty of form and splendid pride of glorious womanhood could be pointed out as a rival to Lady Saxondale. Behold her as she now stands, for a few moments a little way apart from the brilliant throng, with one fair hand lightly resting upon the marble slab of a side-table, surveying the crowds of elegantly dressed men, stately dames, and lovely girls whom she has assembled there, and even the veriest anchorite would be compelled to confess that it were a pity to retire from a world embellished by so superb and magnificent a beauty.

It was during an interval between the dances that Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter, slipped unperceived from the ballroom, and going forth upon the landing, cast a rapid and scrutinizing glance around. Two pages were standing a little way down the staircase, conversing with each other. One of them was Francis Paton, that beautiful youth of eighteen whom we have already described. Juliana called the other page to her, and sent him away on some trifling errand which suggested itself at the moment, and which, indeed, was a mere pretext to enable her to snatch an opportunity of saying a word to his good-looking companion. The moment he had disappeared down the stairs, Juliana beckoned Frank to approach, and the colour mantled in vivid scarlet upon the youth's countenance as he hastened to obey that summons.

" Frank," said Juliana, her own countenance likewise blushing as she bent upon him the flashing light of her superb dark eyes, " tell me, what was that message you delivered to her ladyship before dinner? I noticed that she seemed annoyed and uneasy, and it has troubled me much."

Juliana might have said, if she had told the truth, that the only trouble she had experienced in the matter was that of the most lively curiosity, a curiosity, indeed, so intense that she had not been able to restrain herself until the morrow ere she sought to gratify it.

" It was a woman, miss, who called," replied Frank,

almost overcome with bashfulness, " and she would insist upon seeing her ladyship."

" A woman to be thus impertinent! " exclaimed Juliana, her curiosity still more piqued. " What did she want? "

" I do not know, miss," returned the page, raising his large liquid hazel eyes for a moment to the mantling countenance of the patrician young lady, and then casting down his looks again in greater confusion than before.

" But what sort of a woman was she? " asked Juliana, in a soft, tremulous voice that quivered with the same emotions which made her heart throb; for she felt consumed with a devouring passion as she fixed her regards upon the beautiful youth before her.

" She was a very common woman, miss, wretchedly dressed, with a cloak and cap. She had no bonnet on. Altogether, I did not like her looks. But I suppose she was some poor woman asking charity or a favour, and not knowing very well how to behave herself."

At this moment the sounds of footsteps ascending the stairs were heard, and Juliana, flinging upon the page a look as expressive of a fervid passion as looks could possibly be, turned hurriedly away and passed into an antechamber, where she paused for a few minutes to compose herself, for she felt the blush of her fevered sensations still upon her cheeks. Then, with the image of the beautiful page still uppermost in her mind, but also still continuing to wonder what the meaning of that mysterious visit to Lady Saxondale could possibly be, she returned into the state apartments, where her hand was immediately solicited for the ensuing dance.

We have already said that Mr. Marlow, one of Lord Saxondale's guardians, was a guest at the banquet. His partner, Mr. Malton, had also been invited, but through pressing business, this gentleman had been unable to reach Saxondale House until the saloons were thrown open for the ball. Though somewhat resembling his partner in personal exterior, he was not of the same bustling and volatile character, but far more precise, cool, and sedately business-like. Shortly after he had made his appearance, Mr. Marlow drew him aside, and they conversed together for a few minutes upon some private matters of their own.

" I shall be unable to come to the office to-morrow,"

said Mr. Marlow, "as I have got something particular to do at home. And yet you and I, Malton, must manage to have an hour's conversation in the morning relative to that lawsuit," alluding to the business of which they had been conversing, and which was of great importance to their clients, though of none to the reader.

" Shall I run down to you very early? " asked Mr. Malton.

" Why can't you come home with me to-night? " suggested the bustling Marlow, taking off his kid glove and displaying a splendid diamond ring as he ran his fingers through his hair. " Sleep at my house, and then we can talk over the whole thing at breakfast-time to-morrow. You are a bachelor," he added, laughing, " and have no account to give of your conduct to anybody."

" Well, be it so," responded the junior partner, after a few moments' consideration. " When my carriage comes, I will order it to be dismissed."

" And you will take a seat with me in mine," was Mr. Marlow's prompt rejoinder. " We shall leave at midnight, for I can't stand late hours," and he played somewhat conceitedly with his superb gold guard-chain.

" Nor I either," responded Mr. Malton.

This little arrangement being entered into, the two lawyers separated, and proceeded to different parts of the room to mingle amongst the gay and brilliant groups of Lady Saxondale's guests. But we need not extend this chapter nor dwell at any greater length upon the details of the splendid entertainment, but will at once proceed to turn the reader's attention to a place and a scene contrasting marvellously with the sumptuous mansion and the glittering throng whereof we are now taking our leave.

CHAPTER XVI

LADY BESS

True to her appointment with Chiffin the Cannibal, Madge Somers crossed the threshold of Solomon Patch's boozing-ken in Agar Town just as the clock in the tap-room was striking nine, on the same evening on which Lady Saxondale's entertainment took place.

The Cannibal was drinking with a party of his friends when Madge made her appearance in the tap-room, but laying down his pipe and tossing off the remnants of his liquor, the Cannibal at once rose from his seat and followed her up into the room above. This room was specially devoted to the private conferences of the persons frequenting Solomon Patch's house. It was here that many a dark and desperate deed was planned, here that the perpetrators thereof were wont to assemble afterward and divide the fruits of their iniquity, here also that Mr. Patch himself transacted business with his friends when stolen property was to be disposed of. It was a wretched place, Solomon Patch's love of money and niggard disposition preventing him from laying out the few shillings that might have rendered it somewhat decent. But then, on the other hand, it answered the purpose very well; no one grumbled at its rude furniture, its dirty floor and blackened walls, nor were the persons who were accustomed to use the room of that delicate constitution likely to suffer by the draughts from the broken windows or the places where the absent panes were indifferently stopped up with old rags thrust through. A rude sort of staircase led up to an attic above, and this attic was provided with a bed for the accommodation of any one of Mr. Patch's friends who might seek a temporary retirement until some menacing storm was blown over.

It was into the conference room above described that Madge Somers and Chiffin the Cannibal ascended, the former having obtained a candle from the old landlady.

"Well," said Chiffin, as he took a seat upon a rude stool, "I suppose you have brought me my blunt, according to promise? I have been thinking a good deal over that adventure of last night — "

"Then I beg you will not think any more of it," interrupted Madge peremptorily. "An agreement is an agreement; the business of last night has ceased to be your affair altogether, and is now mine, so I will thank you not to interfere in my concerns, if you wish us to continue good friends."

The Cannibal was about to give some surly reply, when Madge, thrusting her hand into her pocket, drew forth a quantity of sovereigns, which she placed upon the table. The sight of the gold at once made the horrible countenance of the ruffian clear up, — that is to say, it cleared up as much as the murky gloom of a thunder-cloud can be said to brighten when the sun shines forth from another part of the heaven upon it.

"Here are your hundred pounds," said Madge, "and now be contented."

"Well, the look of this precious metal, as romance writers call it," said Chiffin, "is enough to soften a fellow's heart," and while he thus spoke he began to finger the gold pieces, counting them over, first of all, to see that they were right, and then weighing them in his hand. "You have kept your promise, Madge," he continued, as he secured the money about his person, "and I have nothing more to say, unless it is to offer to stand a bowl of punch down-stairs if you will come and partake of it."

But ere the woman had time to give the negative answer which she was about to return, the door opened, and Lady Bess sauntered with graceful ease into the room. She was apparelled exactly in the same manner as when we previously described her, her fine person being admirably set off by the close-fitting frock coat, the well-made pantaloons, and all the other accessories of her masculine garb. For a moment her magnificent large eyes, with so bright a lustre shining in their black depths, were flung scrutinizingly upon Madge Somers and the Cannibal, as if to penetrate their

proceedings at a single glance, and then, with that offhand air of easy negligence and graceful listlessness which generally characterized her, the female highwayman took a seat at the table.

"I hope I am not intruding," she said. "That old scoundrel Solomon told me you were up here closeted together, and as I have got a little business to transact with him I thought there would be no harm in joining you."

"Ah! I suppose it doesn't suit your gentility," growled Chiffin, "to stand lurking about down at the bar, or to go and sit amongst my pals in the tap-room."

"Is it not strange, Chiffin," cried Lady Bess, laughing good-naturedly, and thus displaying the two splendid rows of teeth that graced her rich mouth, "that you always have something complimentary to say to me? And yet I invariably treat you with as much civility as possible."

"Perhaps, you think, more than I deserve," remarked Chiffin, somewhat softened by Lady Bess's open-hearted frankness.

"Under circumstances it certainly is," she responded, "for you scarcely ever say a civil word to me."

"I don't know how it is, but I can't say that I dislike you," resumed Chiffin, "and yet I don't altogether feel myself at home in your presence. You are too fine and grand for me. Besides, you and I never act together."

"Our avocations are so different," exclaimed Lady Bess, with another merry laugh. "But what if I were going to propose something of a grand and startling nature, in which you can assist? Now, Madge, you see the Cannibal's eyes glisten, and he is actually excited with the hint I have thrown out."

"It's because in his heart he feels honoured by this confidence you are going to show him," observed Madge, who keenly and skilfully read the real feeling which had inspired the Cannibal at the moment.

"Honour be hanged!" said Chiffin, surlily. Then immediately adopting a more conciliatory tone, he hastened to observe, "But come, Lady Bess, if there's anything you can really put in my way, I sha'n't refuse to accept it, and it might make us better friends."

"Very good, I will explain myself presently," replied the

female highwayman, for at this moment old Solomon Patch entered the room.

He was an ill-looking man, shabbily dressed, of sordid appearance, and with a sneaking slyness in the expression of his countenance. The love of gain was as clearly traced in every line of those angular features and that wrinkled face as if his character had been written thereon, and it required no great depth of observation to perceive that there was scarcely any villainy from which Solomon Patch would shrink so long as he beheld the certainty of a commensurate reward.

" Am I intruding? " he asked, as he slowly and hesitatingly entered this room, this deferential question not being addressed to either Chiffin or Madge, but to the Amazonian beauty.

" Intruding, no! " she exclaimed. " All I want you to do is to take these trinkets which I picked up on the road last night, and give me what according to your ideas you think they are worth." Thus speaking, Lady Bess, with an indifferent and careless air, took from her pocket a watch and chain and three or four finger-rings. " I might have added some beautiful diamond studs to this little parcel of jewelry if I had chosen," she observed, with a smile upon the fulness of her ripe and luscious lips, " but I let the poor frightened fellow keep them."

While she was thus speaking, the watch and rings which she had laid upon the table had suddenly become the objects of an earnest and intense gaze on the part of Madge Somers, who at once recognized them as having belonged to her guest of the preceding night, young Lord Saxondale. Chiffin the Cannibal was also contemplating the trinkets, not because he knew them, for he did not, but because it was in the man's nature to feel an interest in anything that was the produce of plunder or other illicit proceedings. Lady Bess was herself looking carelessly at the same objects at the moment, and therefore she did not perceive the attention with which Madge Somers was fixing her eyes on them.

Solomon Patch took them off the table, and bent down toward the light in order to examine them as closely as possible with a view to ascertain their value. Then, after a long and careful scrutiny, he said, in a stammering, hesita-

ting manner, "Well, I don't know. I always like to deal with your ladyship, you are so good and generous, but I really couldn't say more than thirty pounds, and that would be quite a stretch, to oblige you."

"Oh, never mind," said Lady Bess, carelessly. "I do not intend to take less than fifty, and as I am in no particular want of money at this moment, I will keep the trinkets till I am. Or perhaps I may take a gallop down to Gravesend one of these fine mornings and see what your brother Israel will offer."

"Stop, stop, my lady," exclaimed old Solomon, evidently not wishing to let a good bargain slip out of his hands. "I — I — don't mind saying forty, and that's the very outside."

"Give me over the things, you old scoundrel," said Lady Bess, more good-naturedly than angrily. "I am resolved not to part with them under the fifty."

Solomon Patch continued turning the watch and chain over and over in his hand; then he examined the rings one after the other; then he recurred to the watch, opening it, examining the works, and, in short, scrutinizing it most minutely in every point. At length, after several fruitless attempts to beat down Lady Bess in her price, he gave her the fifty pounds she demanded and walked off with the spoil.

"Now," said Chiffin, as soon as Solomon Patch had quitted the room, "what about this little business that you have been talking of? Something that you and I can do together, you know, and which is to make us better friends than we have yet been?"

"Oh, you must not think," exclaimed Lady Bess, somewhat haughtily, "that I want to curry favour with you, Chiffin. But if I should be able to let you into a good thing," she added, with her wonted frankness of humour, "perhaps you will in future adopt a more civil tone toward me."

"Well, I don't know but what I should give you my vote if the whole lot of us that frequent Sol. Patch's were to elect a captain. So you see I haven't really any particular dislike to you, Lady Bess," and as Chiffin thus spoke he endeavoured to look as pleasant as possible.

"There," said Madge, addressing herself to the female

highwayman, "I am sure after that you won't refuse to throw a good thing in Chiffin's way."

"Not I!" exclaimed Lady Bess. "And now, then, to the point. Somewhere near Edmonton there lives a lawyer named Marlow. He is very rich, thinks a great deal of himself, and bedecks his person with very valuable jewelry. He has got a diamond ring on his finger that was presented to him by some lady to whose son he is guardian, and this ring is said to be worth two hundred guineas at least. Then his watch is set around with brilliants, he has a splendid diamond pin in his shirt-frill, and in his pocketbook he always carries a good round sum in bank-notes. Now, all these particulars I have ascertained direct from his coachman, no matter how. Well, this Mr. Marlow has gone to a party to-night, and I have positive information that he has got all his splendid jewelry about him, because it is to a first-rate house at the West End that he has gone, — indeed to the very lady's to whose son he is guardian. In a word, between twelve and one o'clock this night it is my intention to ease him of those splendid jewels as well as his purse and pocketbook, on the road to Edmonton."

"And you want me to help you, I suppose?" asked the Cannibal, with a grim smile of satisfaction at the prospect thus held forth.

"Precisely so," returned Lady Bess. "But all the assistance you need render will be merely a pretence, just for the sake of keeping up appearances."

"Ah, I see," observed Chiffin. "I must make believe to keep the coachman in awe while you do the rifling business with his master, isn't that it?"

"You have read my purpose exactly," responded Lady Bess. "And now, do you agree? The booty shall be disposed of to old Solomon, and of course we will divide the produce equally, that is to say, leaving a third share for the coachman."

"I like the business, and the business likes me," responded Chiffin. "But is it a safe place to do a thing of this sort? I mean along the road there, down toward Tottenham or Edmonton?"

"Safe!" echoed Lady Bess, her full lips wreathing in scornful contempt of danger. Then, as a sudden recollection struck her, she laughingly exclaimed, "Why, those things

that I have just sold to old Patch were picked up on that very same road last night. Ha! ha! ha! it was one of the finest adventures you ever heard of in the whole course of your life. I was galloping out of London along the Seven Sisters Road, when I met a young fellow — never mind his name, although he told it to me — who was wandering about in a benighted state. So I offered him a bed at my house."

"Where do you live, then?" asked Chiffin, who, with his arm resting on the table and his head bent forward, was listening attentively to the Amazon's tale.

"Never mind where I live," she responded, with an arch smile. "Suffice it for you to know that I pretended for the nonce to live in that neighbourhood, and invited the youngster home. He accepted the invitation, and got up behind me on my horse. I could perceive that when he held me around the waist he discovered that I was not exactly of the sex I at first seemed, for I felt him trembling like an aspen leaf. How I laughed in my sleeve! But our ride did not continue very far, for in a few minutes we reached a convenient part of the road, where it is quite lonely, and there I threw my gentleman off and made him surrender up those trinkets which I have just handed over to Solomon."

At this moment Lady Bess, who had been talking in a careless, offhand manner, without addressing herself particularly either to the Cannibal or Madge, suddenly raised her eyes and was perfectly struck by the singular look which that woman was fixing upon her. Lady Bess could not possibly penetrate the meaning of that look, it was so strange, so sinister, so unfathomable.

"Ah, then it was a good night's work for you?" exclaimed Madge, instantaneously resuming her wonted aspect, and endeavouring to appear as if she had not been excited by any extraordinary emotion.

"Yes, a tolerably good night's work," answered the female highwayman, not choosing to question the woman — at least on that occasion — as to the cause of the strangeness of her manner a moment back. "Besides this gold," she went on to say, leisurely gathering up the money she had received from Patch, and which she had until now left lying upon the table with a careless indifference concerning it, "I got a well-filled purse from my deluded companion of that double ride on horseback. Poor fellow, he was fright-

ened out of his wits, and I am very sure that he will not go and confess to his mamma," she added, laughing ironically, " that he was robbed by a woman. But now I shall take my departure. Chiffin, you will meet me at the bridge over the canal half an hour after midnight. You know where I mean, in the road leading to Tottenham."

" I know," responded Chiffin, " and I shall be there before my time. It won't take much more than an hour's walk, so if I leave here at a quarter past eleven it will be all right."

Lady Bess now quitted the wretched-looking room, and descending the stairs, issued from the public-house; then mounting her horse, she rode away.

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAWYERS

It was a rather dark night, for there was no moon, and the clouds that were flitting over the face of heaven, borne on the wings of a somewhat strong breeze, obscured the beams of the twinkling stars. The lamps of Mr. Marlow's carriage were, however, lighted, and rapidly was the vehicle proceeding along the Tottenham Road, driven by the treacherous coachman through whose agency the contemplated robbery had been suggested. The carriage was of that kind which in a former instance we have already described as a brougham; it therefore had no footman either standing or seated behind, the coachman being the only servant attached to it.

Inside, Mr. Marlow and Mr. Malton were lounging comfortably back, conversing upon the gaieties which they had so recently quitted at Saxondale House, and intermingling their discourse with a few business remarks relative to the various matters which their extensive office had to conduct. For the firm of Marlow and Malton was one of the most eminent as well as the wealthiest in London, all their business being chiefly with clients belonging to the highest orders of society.

The equipage had just crossed the canal bridge, and was proceeding at a slower pace down the somewhat steep slope which the road takes in the direction of Tottenham, when the two lawyers were suddenly startled by the quick trampling of a horse galloping up to the side of the carriage, and a peremptory command to the coachman to stop. At the same instant they saw a fellow with a huge club bound from the side of the road and spring up on the box, where, seizing upon the coachman, he warned him with terrible threats

not to offer the slightest resistance. The coachman did not mean to do anything of the sort, he being well prepared beforehand for this facetious portion of the drama.

Mr. Malton, who was on the side nearest to the mounted highwayman, instantaneously let down the window, and with a quick glance surveyed the daring individual, whose person was plainly visible by the light of the carriage lamps. Nevertheless, the keen eyes of Mr. Malton did not detect the real sex of the highwayman, nor could he even catch the slightest glimpse of Lady Bess's countenance, inasmuch as she had put on a black mask just before stopping the carriage. But Mr. Malton did perceive that the mounted bandit was of somewhat slender make, and at all events afforded no outward indications of any extraordinary degree of physical strength. Such was the idea that immediately struck him as the result of the first few moments' survey, and he had little leisure to regard her any longer, for he was almost instantaneously called upon to some prompt and decisive course of action by the demand which Lady Bess at once made for the surrender up of purses and jewels.

She had not expected to find two gentlemen seated inside the vehicle, and on discovering that there were two she immediately apprehended resistance. Therefore, drawing forth a pocket-pistol, she presented it at the window, saying, in the roughest tone to which she could possibly disguise her voice, "Quick, quick, gentlemen! Your purses, your watches, and so forth!"

"No, by Heaven! not without a struggle for it!" exclaimed Mr. Malton, who was a man of undaunted courage; and as he spoke he dashed open the door and sprang forth from the vehicle with a gold-headed cane in his hand.

The abrupt opening of the door made Lady Bess's horse suddenly shy and veer around, and she, being at the instant unprepared for such a movement, was thrown heavily. Mr. Malton, with admirable presence of mind, clutched the horse's bridle with one hand, while with the other he snatched up the pistol which Lady Bess had let drop and which had happened not to explode. Mr. Marlow, the elder partner, encouraged by the resolute bravery of his friend, likewise sprang forth, and perceiving at a glance that the highwayman who lay upon the ground was either stunned or killed

by the fall, he seized upon the legs of Chiffin the Cannibal, who had mounted to the box.

"This scoundrel is killed," ejaculated Mr. Malton, alluding to Lady Bess, who lay quite motionless.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Chiffin, and violently disengaging himself from the hold which Mr. Marlow had fastened upon him, he sprang down from the box and rushed away as fast as his legs would carry him.

Mr. Marlow was thrown to the ground by the sudden violence of the Cannibal, but instantly rising to his feet, he shook himself, not merely for the purpose of casting off the dust which his garments had gathered by rolling in it, but likewise to assure himself that he had no broken bones. While, however, he was still somewhat uncertain on the latter point, his thoughts were quickly startled into another channel by an ejaculation which burst from the lips of his partner.

"Why, by Heaven, it is a woman!" exclaimed Mr. Malton, who had just stooped down to ascertain whether the highwayman was actually killed or only stunned by the severe fall experienced from the horse.

"A woman!" echoed Mr. Marlow, likewise stooping down. "Ay, and a very handsome one into the bargain," for his partner had plucked the black mask from her countenance. "But, dear me! I am very much mistaken if I don't know this face — yes, and that horse, too — why, to be sure, I cannot be deceived! I have seen this woman — a lady I always thought her — riding about Tottenham and Edmonton on that very horse, but not in this attire, though, in a proper female riding-habit. John, haven't you seen this lady?"

"Never mind asking any questions now," said Mr. Malton, somewhat impatiently. "See, she lives, she opens her eyes."

And it was so. Lady Bess had been merely stunned by the fall, and consciousness rapidly returning, she became aware of the position in which she was placed, a prisoner in the hands of the two attorneys.

"Are you hurt young woman?" demanded Mr. Malton, with a sternness that was only tempered by a feeling of humanity.

"No, I think not," answered Lady Bess, rising to her

feet. Then, while she was rapidly calculating the chances of escape, Mr. Malton seized her by the coat collar, while Mr. Marlow clutched her by the arm.

"This is a deed on your part which we cannot overlook," said the former.

"Certainly not," promptly added the latter. "As lawyers we must obey the law, and the law forbids us to let a felon escape."

"I can scarcely expect any forbearance at your hands, under the circumstances," responded Lady Bess, "and I am not going to ask it. Do with me as you will," and she not only spoke in a firm tone, but likewise displayed a resolute dauntlessness of manner which quite astonished the two lawyers.

"What on earth are we to do with her?" asked Mr. Marlow.

"Take her on to Edmonton and give her to the police," was Mr. Malton's reply.

"You are known, young woman, you are known," said Marlow, as talkative as he was bustling, and now labouring under the greatest excitement. "I have seen you galloping about on this splendid dark chestnut of yours, but in a costume more befitting your sex. Why, 'pon my soul, I took you for a lady. I say, John, I have often noticed her to you, and I remember you mentioned her name once. What was it?"

"Sir," immediately interposed Lady Bess, who was chivalrously resolved to screen the treacherous servant, and thus save him from the perplexity of having to answer questions by the replies to which he might fear to compromise her, and thus in his hesitation draw suspicion on himself, "I will at once candidly and frankly inform you that I live near Tottenham, close at hand, indeed, and that I pass by the name of Mrs. Chandos."

"Chandos, to be sure!" ejaculated the volatile Marlow, "that is it."

"And now," Lady Bess immediately went on to observe, "although I seek no forbearance at your hands, I will request this little favour, — that you permit me to call at my abode ere you consign me to the custody of the authorities, so that I may acquaint my servant with the position in which I am placed."

"Well, I see no harm in that," exclaimed Mr. Marlow. "Eh, Malton, what do you say?"

"I do not wish to behave harshly or cruelly to the unhappy young woman," was the latter gentleman's more measured response.

"My house is yonder, the white cottage which you see amongst the trees in that lane to the left," and Lady Bess extended her arm in the direction which she indicated.

"Well, then, how shall we manage?" exclaimed Marlow. "Oh, I know. We will fasten the horse by the bridle to the carriage, and take our prisoner inside with us. Here, you hold her tight, Malton, while I dispose of the horse. 'Pon my soul, it is a splendid animal. I have often admired it, but little thought it was ridden by a highwayman, or rather, a highway-woman."

While thus chattering, Mr. Marlow attached the horse's bridle to the back of the carriage, and that being done, Lady Bess was desired to enter the vehicle. This she at once did without the slightest indication of any failure of courage. Then the two lawyers being likewise ensconced within the vehicle, the equipage drove away.

In a few minutes it reached the bottom of the slope, and passing out of the main road, entered the lane in which Lady Bess's residence was situated. This was soon gained, and the carriage, with the dark chestnut trotting behind it, stopped in front of a neat cottage almost embowered in trees and having a very picturesque appearance.

"Who the deuce would have thought," exclaimed Mr. Marlow, as he bustled out of the vehicle, "that this beautiful place was occupied by so lawless a character? 'Pon my soul, it appears like a dream. Young woman, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, such a good-looking person as you are — "

"Come, come, Marlow, don't let us reproach her," interrupted Mr. Malton, as he held tight hold of Lady Bess's arm while she descended from the vehicle. "She will be punished enough, I dare say."

"Will you let me take my horse to the stable?" she inquired, "for I have no groom on the premises. A man who lives at yon hut" — and she pointed to a little cottage at a short distance — "is in the habit of coming to attend upon it."

" Oh, yes, we are not warring against the horse," ejaculated Mr. Marlow. " Here, I will soon help you. Where is the stable? Round at the back? "

At this moment the front door was opened, and a woman of about thirty, and exceedingly respectable in appearance, came out. By the light which streamed forth from the passage of the house and which blended with that of the carriage lamps, this woman exchanged a rapid glance with Mr. Marlow's coachman, but although Lady Bess perceived and understood it, neither of the two lawyers did.

" Rosa," said Lady Bess, " do not be frightened. I am in some little trouble, and shall have to go away with these gentlemen. I have had a sad fall from my horse, too, and have wounded my right leg. I feel that it is bleeding, and indeed the blood has run down into my boot. But never mind."

" Oh, my dear, dear mistress! " exclaimed Rosa, rushing forward and clasping her hands as if in despair. Then stooping down, she felt the Amazon's pantaloons, exclaiming, " Gracious! you are indeed bleeding! "

" In that case," said Mr. Malton, " we must allow you time to let your servant examine your injury and dress it. I have already said that we do not wish to use unnecessary harshness."

" I thank you, sir, for your courtesy, or I should say your generosity," and Lady Bess appeared to speak with a sincere feeling.

The horse was now speedily led around to the stable, where the saddle and bridle were taken off by Mr. Marlow's own hands, and then the two lawyers, Lady Bess, and the servant entered the house. An elegantly furnished parlour received them, and Messrs. Marlow and Malton could not help exchanging a look of astonishment at the evidences of a refined taste which the room presented to their view. Several good pictures, three or four beautiful little alabaster groups of statues, vases of flowers, and musical instruments ornamented the place. Rosa hastened to light the wax candles on the mantel, and then Lady Bess said, " You will permit me, gentlemen, to ascend with my servant to my chamber for a few minutes? "

" Ah, but what guarantee have we against your escape? " at once cried Mr. Marlow.

"I know not," returned the female highwayman, with an appearance of the utmost frankness, "unless you station yourselves on the landing outside."

"Well, this we must do, then, I suppose," exclaimed Mr. Marlow.

"Yes, there is no alternative," added Mr. Malton, who, though really regretting to be compelled to proceed to extremities against this extraordinary woman, was nevertheless one of those scrupulous and punctilious individuals who imagine that severity in such cases is a duty which they owe to society.

"Lead the way, Rosa," said Lady Bess, "and I will follow with these gentlemen."

The servant accordingly issued from the room, holding in her hand the chamber candle with which she had previously lighted the tapers on the mantel, and the two lawyers, keeping Lady Bess between them, proceeded up a handsomely carpeted staircase to the landing above.

"This is my room," said the Amazon, pointing to the door which Rosa had just opened, "and you will perhaps convince yourselves that it has no other outlet."

"Yes, that I will do," said the volatile Mr. Marlow, and he hastened into the chamber, while Lady Bess remained outside on the landing with Mr. Malton.

"It's all right," exclaimed the senior partner, as he came forth again. "There's no possible escape, unless she leaps out of the window or gets up the chimney; but the former is too high from the ground, and the latter too narrow."

"Then we leave you for a few minutes with your servant," said Mr. Malton.

Lady Bess accordingly passed into the bedchamber, while the two lawyers stayed outside upon the landing.

"Fear nothing," said the Amazonian lady, in the lowest possible whisper to her servant, the instant they were thus alone together. "Your cousin is unsuspected; I have screened him. My plans are all arranged. And now at once begin talking loud, as if you were lamenting my misfortunes while dressing my wound."

The truth is that Lady Bess had no wound at all, nor had she sustained any injury beyond a slight contusion or two from the fall in the road. The idea of the wound and the ghastly story of the blood streaming into her boot was

a ready invention on her part, and which Rosa had at once comprehended, for the purpose of obtaining this opportunity of ascending to her chamber in company with the servant.

"Oh, my dear, dear mistress!" exclaimed Rosa, affecting a voice of lamentation and distress, "what trouble you have got yourself into! How did all this happen? What does it mean? Well, well, poor dear lady, I won't worry you. I dare say you will tell me all about it another time. But, O dear me, what a wound! Why, you must have cut yourself with a sharp flintstone or something. You would certainly have bled to death if you had gone without having the wound dressed. And the boot, too, almost filled with blood, the stocking dripping wet! Dear me, dear me!"

In this strain did Rosa go on talking, at the same time treading about the room and making a clatter with the things, just as if she were in the excitement of a tremendous bustle to get all that was necessary under the circumstances. But in the meanwhile what was Lady Bess herself doing?

The instant she had given those hurried and softly whispered instructions to Rosa, she delayed not in carrying into execution the plan which had suggested itself to her while she was arriving thither in the carriage. She looked at her watch; it wanted exactly twenty-five minutes to two o'clock. No time to lose. Taking a very small scrap of paper, she wrote thereon the following lines:

"Deletzyd, szcdpd.

"Ozgpc, Oz dzxpestyr ez aczgp *hld le jzfc szfdp estp trse.

"Ehpyej xtyfepd ez ehz."

Having folded up this little scrap of paper into the smallest possible compass, she tied a small piece of silken thread around it, which being done, she hastily whispered to Rosa, "Make some good rattling noise while I open the window."

Rosa, instantaneously obeying this order, commenced no inconsiderable din with the basin and jug and other things on the washing-stand, during which clatter Lady Bess opened the casement, the noise thereof being drowned in the din of the crockeryware. She now reached forth her hand, and took in a large wicker bird-cage which hung just outside the window. This cage contained two beautiful doves

of the carrier breed. One of these doves the Amazonian lady took forth from the cage, and in less than a minute tied the little scrap of paper with the silken cord under its wing. She then opened her hand, and the messenger-bird flew out of the window, instantaneously disappearing in the obscurity of the night.

Meanwhile, in pursuance of another rapidly whispered command from her mistress, Rosa had fastened the two sheets of the bed together, and had tied one extremity to the bedpost, which was near the casement.

"In two or three days I shall be back again, safe and sound. Don't fear; nothing can be done to you, and your cousin John is unsuspected."

Having whispered these words, Lady Bess lost not another instant in passing herself out of the casement, and with wondrous agility and skill she glided down the twisted sheets, so that with but a slight fall she reached the ground in safety.

To hasten to the stable, put the saddle and bridle on the horse, and lead forth the noble animal, was now the work of but a couple of minutes; then vaulting on its back, Lady Bess was borne away like an arrow shot from a bow.

In the meantime Rosa had gone on talking in the room in the same strain as before, and precisely as if her mistress was still there. The two solicitors, who were out on the landing, failed not to catch most of what the woman uttered, although, for delicacy's sake, they had not approached nearer to the door than the narrowness of the landing rendered necessary. All that we have described from the moment Lady Bess entered her chamber with Rosa until she flitted away on the back of her noble steed barely occupied a quarter of an hour, and that was no great length of time to examine a wound, wash it, fasten bandages on it, and allow for taking off and putting on those garments that it was necessary to remove and change. At least such was the calculation made relative to the lapse of minutes by the two lawyers. Yet, toward the end of the interval named, a feeling of uneasiness and a sense of misgiving began to creep into the minds of both. Not that they thought Lady Bess was too long in her chamber, but those continuous outpourings of lamentations, ejaculations, and comments on the part of Rosa, added to the din she had created with

the crockeryware, struck them as being suspicious, for it all looked as if the woman were playing a part, — a part, too, which she was now overdoing. They were therefore just on the point of knocking at the door, and insisting upon Lady Bess coming forth, when they were struck with consternation on hearing the sudden trampling of the horse's feet as he was being led from the stable.

"By Heaven, we are tricked!" exclaimed Marlow, and without ceremony he rushed into the bedchamber.

The open window and the rope of sheets which Rosa was just dragging in told the tale.

"Wretch," cried Marlow, "you have aided your mistress's escape! But you shall go to prison for her."

"Let her alone," exclaimed Mr. Malton. "We will punish the guilty one yet," and he rushed down the stairs, closely followed by his partner.

"Why did you not stop her? Don't you see that she has escaped?" cried Marlow, addressing himself fiercely to the coachman.

"I saw some one, sir, gallop around from the back of the house and bolt away like a shot," answered the coachman, "but how could I possibly stop her? I scarcely knew who it could be till she was out of sight, and then it was only suspicion, for she whisked by at such a rate."

"True," cried Marlow, "the window is at the back of the house, the stable also. Well, John, I was wrong to blame you. But now, what is to be done?" he demanded, turning to his partner. "We shall be the laughing-stock of all London if we let her escape us thus."

"Besides," added Mr. Malton, "it is more than ever imperative that the outraged laws should be satisfied."

"But what is to be done?" again asked Mr. Marlow, more excited than before.

"Depend upon it, she means to get out of the country," responded the junior partner, after a few moments' reflection. "I tell you what we must do. We will go on to your house, and snatch a few hours' sleep, then off by the first trains in the morning, one of us to Dover and the other to Liverpool. France and America, these are the alternatives for this desperate woman."

"Yes, that is our course," returned Marlow. "I would

not for a thousand guineas that she escaped us in the long run."

The two lawyers then entered the carriage, which immediately drove away to Mr. Marlow's mansion, which was about a mile distant.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MESSENGER-BIRD

A LITTLE beyond Gravesend there stood a small public-house, in a somewhat lonely spot, though by the side of the main road. The landlord of this place, which bore the name of the Dancing Bear, was called Israel Patch, and was a younger brother of the keeper of the boozing-ken in London. Not merely was he the brother of Solomon, but Israel was of kindred character and pursuits, his public-house being the resort of all the desperate characters of the district, especially the smugglers belonging to the Thames and Medway. The Dancing Bear had long been the object of suspicion on the part of the local authorities, but so cunningly had Israel managed matters that he had never done any overt act which could be positively brought home to him.

Israel Patch was a widower, but had a grown-up daughter living with him to superintend his establishment. She was a woman of about thirty, remarkably ugly, and in every way of a character fitted to aid her father in his money-making and nefarious pursuits. Her Christian name was Rebecca, but she was universally known amongst the frequenters of the house by the diminutive of Becky.

We must now observe that Israel Patch slept in a little room behind his bar on the ground floor, but Becky slept in an attic quite on the top of the house. This attic had no flat ceiling to separate it from the sloping roof, but may be described as being covered only by the roof itself, — in plain terms, it was just beneath the tiles. On a flat portion of this roof there appeared a very singular contrivance, namely, a little trap-door of a foot square, made of a piece of wood not much thicker than a good stout cardboard.

It was retained by two little hinges on one side, and as it opened downward, it had a very slight and flexible steel spring fixed underneath to keep it shut. As a matter of course, if this spring were taken away, the little trap-door would drop downward, and it must likewise be understood that the spring was so slight that while it was but just strong enough to sustain the door, the slightest weight touching the door on the uppermost side would make it sink down. But this was not quite all, for a little bell was suspended to the rafters close by the trap-door, and by another simple contrivance it was so arranged that if the trap-door opened by being pressed downward it caused this bell to ring. Every night, before retiring to rest, Rebecca Patch opened the little trap-door, and thrusting her arm through to the roof, drew in three small saucers. One she filled with water, the second with tares or parched peas, and the third with salt; then, having done this, she put the saucers out upon the roof again in a little sort of wooden recess or hutch, the object of which was merely to prevent the salt from being saturated with wet in case of rain. This was Rebecca's nightly duty, and which she fulfilled with the utmost regularity.

We may now continue our tale. It was two o'clock in the morning when Becky Patch was suddenly startled from her sleep by the tinkling of the little bell, and though its sound could scarcely have awakened any person under ordinary circumstances, yet by dint of habit the least note thereof would rouse up Israel Patch's daughter as effectually as if a cannon were fired close by her ears. Springing from her couch, Becky instantaneously lighted a candle, and coaxingly extended her arm toward a pigeon which now appeared perched on the upper rail of a chair immediately under the little trap-door. The bird, with instinctive tameness, seemed to recognize a known friend, and immediately flew on the woman's wrist. She caressed and addressed it in fondling terms; then she refreshed it with water, and having done this, looked beneath its wing. Thence she unfastened the little scrap of paper which was tied there, and calculating for a moment the day of the month, muttered to herself, " The letter L is the key."

Then she hastily glanced over the contents of the billet, upon which she made a cross with a pen, and having forth-

with folded it up again, she replaced it under the bird's wing. This being done, she gave the feathered messenger some peculiar kind of food which she always had in readiness in the room, and the little carrier being thus refreshed was put forth through the trap-door again. It immediately took wing and sped away on its important errand.

"Twenty minutes to two when the bird was sent off," muttered Rebecca to herself. Then, as she took an old silver watch from under her pillow and saw that it was now about ten minutes past two, she observed, "There's plenty of time."

She then put on some clothing, and descending the stairs, proceeded to the little room where her father slept.

"Well, what is it?" exclaimed Israel Patch, as he started up in his couch.

"A message," responded his daughter. "Lady Bess has sent it. You must have a horse in readiness. The despatch is dated twenty minutes to two, and it is now nearly a quarter past."

"What a time the bird has been in coming!" ejaculated Patch.

"No such thing," rejoined his daughter. "The dove was here in twenty minutes after it was sent on the wing, and that is doing more than a mile a minute, taking the distance from Lady Bess's to this place. It is me that have delayed somewhat in coming down, as I saw that there was no hurry. Besides, I had to feed the bird, hadn't I?"

"Well, you can go up to bed again. I will dress myself, get the horse in readiness, and wait."

Rebecca Patch left her father the candle which she had brought with her, and then remounting the stairs, gained her attic and lay down to rest once more.

Rapid as the flight of that pigeon which bore the mysterious billet beneath its wing must we transport the reader to another public-house much farther along the same road. Indeed, this latter was about four miles on the London side of Canterbury. It was situated on the summit of Boughton Hill, at no great distance from a village, but completely isolated therefrom. The sign raised upon the top of a tall post was daubed with such an effigy of a Red Dragon as the painter's imagination had suggested. The house was of sombre and dilapidated appearance, with so suspicious a

look that no solitary traveller with a well-filled purse in his pocket would choose such a hostel as a resting-place for the night. It was kept by a man and his wife named Dean, and they, as the reader may suspect, were not a whit more particular how they made money than either Solomon Patch in London or his brother Israel near Gravesend. They had a son, a lad of about eighteen, whose Christian name was Joseph. He was an intelligent, shrewd, keen fellow, having well profited by his parents' example in such wrong-sided experiences of the world as he was likely to glean therefrom.

This lad slept by himself up in a garret, or, rather, a sort of loft on the top of the house, and here might be observed precisely the same curious apparatus fixed in the roof as we have described in reference to the attic at the Dancing Bear. There was the little trap-door lightly sustained by the steel spring, the small bell, and the hutch with the three saucers on the tiles outside. With the same regularity as Rebecca Patch observed in replenishing those saucers did Joe Dean perform the same duty, and with equal sensitiveness was he ready to start up from his slumbers at the slightest summons of the metallic tongue of the monitor-bell. Above the head of his truckle-bed a common pinchbeck watch was suspended by a dirty ribbon to a nail fastened in the wall.

The hands of that watch indicated that it was exactly half-past two o'clock, on that same night, or, rather, morning, of which we are speaking, when Joe Dean was suddenly awakened from his sleep by the tinkling chime of the bell. He started up, lighted his candle, and took the messenger-bird, which having alighted on the trap-door had sunk down with it into the room. Then ensued precisely the same process as we have already described at the Dancing Bear. Joe Dean, having first of all given the bird some water, detached the billet from beneath its wing, read its contents, made a mark upon it with a pen, folded it up again, and attached it once more to the pinion of the feathered messenger. Having fed and caressed the dove, he let it loose again through the trap-door, and away it sped on the third and last stage of its aerial journey. The lad, having noticed the time by his watch, thereupon went down-stairs and communicated to his father the nature of the message which had just been received.

Again must we transport the reader's attention to some distance, and this time we halt at Dover. There, in one of the principal streets, was a tavern of respectable appearance bearing the sign of the Admiral's Head. It was kept by an old man named Marshall, who in his younger days had served on board one of the privateers which Dover in the war-time was wont to send forth to prey upon the French maritime commerce. His father had been the owner and captain of the privateer, and had amassed some little money, with which at the Peace he had established himself at the Admiral's Head. Robert Marshall, the present owner of the place, was considered to be a respectable man enough. His house was well frequented, and he was known to be comfortable in his circumstances. He was always regular in his attendance at church, subscribed to charities, sent the clergyman of the parish a handsome present at Christmas, and never had any complaints made against his house on the score of irregularity or disorder. He therefore stood uncommonly well with the leading persons in the town; and if a whisper did now and then circulate that old Bob Marshall had excellent French brandy in his establishment which had never passed the custom-house, or that his wife and daughters went to church on Sundays in French silks, gloves, and shoes, upon which no duty had ever been paid to the British government, Bob Marshall was not wanting in influential friends to take up the cudgels on his behalf and defend him against what they declared to be a most scandalous imputation.

Mr. Marshall had three daughters, whose ages averaged from about eighteen to twenty-four, and very fine, good-looking, and genteel young women they were. The eldest, whose Christian name was Catherine, familiarly abbreviated into Kate, had from her girlhood been very fond of keeping poultry, pigeons, and other favourites of the feathered tribe in the large stable-yard in the rear of the tavern. Especially had she a very choice and beautiful breed of doves, to which she was greatly attached, and though some of the neighbours found that these birds were wont to get upon the tops of their houses and displace the tiles, they never complained angrily, because old Marshall was invariably so ready to have any such damage repaired at his own expense, and Miss Kate was sure to make compensation

by sending a fat turkey or a brace of pullets as a propitiation at Christmas. But of all the friends and acquaintances of the Marshalls who were aware of the eldest young lady's fondness for the feathered tribe, not one of them was ever admitted to the knowledge of the circumstance that she had a bedchamber prettily fitted up in the highest story of the house, and that in the roof of this chamber there were precisely the same contrivances as those which we have already explained at the Red Dragon on Boughton Hill and the Dancing Bear near Gravesend. Yet such was the fact, and in that neat but somewhat airily situated chamber did Kate Marshall sleep, and whenever the tinkling bell sounded she was as ready to spring from her couch as either Joe Dean or Becky Patch at their respective habitations.

An elegant little French timepiece standing upon the chest of drawers intimated that it wanted ten minutes to three o'clock when the tinkling summons was given, and Miss Kate was suddenly startled from a very pleasant dream in which the image of her intended husband, the captain of a small trading-vessel, was conspicuous. Leaping from the couch, she at once perceived by the aid of her night-lamp, which she always kept burning, a beautiful carrier-pigeon upon a rail a couple of feet below the trap-door. Her plump white arm was immediately outstretched to receive the little messenger, and the next moment the sweet bird was fondly nestling in its kind friend's bosom. Then she gave it water, and detaching the little billet from beneath its wing, hastily opened it. A small manuscript-book which she took from a drawer, and which was filled with dates, references, and initial letters, promptly refreshed her memory so as to supply the key to the reading of the scroll, which without such a clue would necessarily have been a mere jargon as incomprehensible as the Egyptian hieroglyphics. Having made herself acquainted with the words upon the paper, she proceeded to administer food to the bird. This being done, she fondled and caressed it again for a minute or two, and then let it escape through the trap-door in the roof of her chamber.

Kate Marshall now hastily slipped on some clothing, and stealing down-stairs, knocked gently at the chamber where her father and mother slept. Mr. Marshall immediately rose, put on a dressing-gown, and admitted his daughter.

"A message, I suppose?" he at once said, as she entered the room.

"From Lady Bess," responded Kate. "Here it is. The key is the letter L. The pigeon was sent off at twenty minutes to two, and arrived here at ten minutes to three, one hour and ten minutes in all."

"And what's the distance, Kate?" asked Mrs. Marshall.

"Why, mother, by the road, Dover is seventy-two miles from London, you know," responded the daughter, "and then allowing that Lady Bess's cottage is five miles from London, the whole distance would be seventy-seven. But then, as the bird flies, it would not be much more than seventy, making a mile a minute, inclusive of the short stoppages at the two stations on the road."

While Miss Kate was thus speaking, her father had deciphered the scrap of paper, and had then burned it by the flame of the candle.

"Well, there is plenty of time to tutor your sisters and the servants what to say," the old man immediately observed. "Some hours must elapse before she will be here, although with the relays she has ordered she will no doubt gallop like the wind. The little bird has performed its message well, for the two marks were made in the corner of the paper, were they not?"

"Yes, in the usual way," responded Kate, "and therefore there is no doubt that the pigeon stopped both at Gravesend and Boughton."

"Well, you can go up to bed again, Kate," said her father. "But be up by six o'clock, and then we will arrange what is to be said."

"Yes, but did you not observe," asked the young woman, "that something is to be done at once, to prove —"

"To be sure! I have it," exclaimed the astute Marshall. "I know what I will do. Leave it all to me, and you go up to bed, Kate."

His daughter accordingly left the room, and Mr. Marshall at once proceeded to dress himself with the utmost despatch. He then quitted the chamber, telling his wife that he should not be many minutes absent. Descending the stairs, he opened the front door of the tavern, taking the key in his pocket, so as to be able to let himself in again, and hurrying along the street, at length stopped at a house where the

coloured lamp burning over the door indicated the abode of a surgeon. Marshall rang the night-bell with some degree of violence, and in a few minutes the door was opened by the medical man's assistant.

"Hallo! is that you, Mr. Marshall?" he exclaimed, immediately recognizing the tavern-keeper. "Is there anything the matter up at the Admiral's Head?"

"Yes, a lady who arrived last evening has been seized with a fit. She's a little better now, as my daughters are attending upon her, but I want you to give me a composing draught, or something of the kind, so as to prevent a relapse. I am sorry to have disturbed you —"

"Don't mention it, Mr. Marshall," immediately exclaimed the assistant. "It's all in the way of business. Come into the surgery, and I will see what I can do for you, unless you think it is a case for which I had better call up Mr. Hood," alluding to his master.

"No, not at all," rejoined the tavern-keeper. "I dare say you can give something that will answer the purpose, if I describe what sort of a fit it was."

"Oh, certainly," replied the assistant, "and then Mr. Hood will call around in the morning and see the lady."

While thus speaking, the assistant led the way into the surgery, and old Marshall described the ordinary symptoms of an hysterical fit. The assistant speedily compounded a draught, and as he wrote out the label to put upon the bottle, he asked, "What name shall I say?"

"Mrs. Chandos," was old Marshall's prompt answer.

The name was accordingly written upon the label, and Marshall, thanking the assistant for his attention, took his departure. Returning to his house, he ascended to his chamber, undressed himself again, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIX

THE JOURNEY

We must now return to Lady Bess, whom we left at the moment when, seated on her gallant steed, she fled from her cottage in the manner already described. Making the best of her way into London, she crossed Blackfriar's Bridge, and proceeded straight for the Kent Road. In an hour and a quarter from the time she had quitted the cottage she entered upon Blackheath. There she walked her horse, although the noble animal, as if instinctively aware of its mistress's need, appeared impatient to career onward again.

The dauntless Amazon was in the highest possible spirits, not only at the achievement she had already performed in effecting her escape from the lawyers, but likewise at the measures she had taken to disentangle herself in the long run from the meshes of the law and be able to turn around and laugh in their faces. She thought of Turpin's memorable ride to York, an exploit which had saved him from the strong arm of justice on that occasion, it being held impossible for a man who appeared at York at daybreak to have committed a crime in London on the preceding evening, the distance being close on two hundred miles. But Lady Bess's stratagem, as she had devised it, was if possible still more ingenious, and the evidence to be eventually given in her favour would be still more conclusive, as the reader will presently see.

It was now three o'clock in the morning, and she had sixty-four miles to ride. But this distance she was confident of being able to achieve within a very few hours, although it formed no part of her plan to imitate Dick Turpin in the astounding feat of accomplishing the journey with the same horse.

Having breathed her gallant courser for a few minutes on Blackheath, Lady Bess gave it the rein, and away, away it flew with astonishing velocity.

"Fifteen miles from this point to Gravesend, or, rather, sixteen hence to the Dancing Bear, and I must do the distance in an hour."

Thus she spoke aloud, her flutelike voice sounding melodiously through the fresh air of morning. The twilight was glimmering in the east, very faintly as yet, but still it was appearing, and she thought to herself that she would yet ride many a mile ere the sun rose, ay, and many a long mile more too, ere it should be very high above the horizon. The exhilaration which she felt amounted almost to an intoxication. She was as happy as if not the slightest danger hung over her head, happier, indeed, for it was in consequence of that danger she was now pursuing an adventure so thoroughly congenial to her daring, dauntless, reckless character. Her horse needed not the touch of spur or whip; an occasional caress with the hand and the encouraging voice of its mistress impelled the animal to the development of all its powers of swiftness, and never did the lithe and graceful Arab courser dash with a more lightning speed over the arid desert than Lady Bess's gallant horse along the highroad to Dover. The weather at that hour in the morning and in the genial month of June was delicious, with just a sufficient freshness of breeze to cool down the perspiration of the flying animal, and to heighten into the richest glow the bloom upon its rider's cheeks. She felt a buoyancy of spirits and a lightness of heart such as she had never experienced before. Though always of a free and jovial and careless disposition, yet now her happiness was a delirium, a whirl of bliss, an ecstasy. The blood ran like lightning in her veins, and from time to time her merry laugh rang through the air like a peal of silver bells, as she thought of the glorious feat of outwitting the two keen and cunning lawyers.

Now the town of Dartford is reached. She somewhat relaxes the speed of her horse, so as not to excite suspicion, should any loiterer or early riser be about, by dashing through the street at too tremendous a pace. But scarcely are the limits of the sleeping town cleared, when away she flies again along the well-beaten road. Now she has a

glimpse of the Thames as it winds its way past Greenhithe, then she loses sight of it again, but in a few minutes more she obtains a fuller view of the broad and ample flood as she passes over an eminence near Northfleet. Onward still, with an unrelaxing speed, the dark chestnut flies. Gravesend is reached, again she checks the noble animal in his career, but not a soul appears in the street, and in a few minutes more she dashes up to the front of the Dancing Bear. She looks at her watch; 'tis four o'clock, and she is exultant.

At the same moment that she springs from her steed the stable-door of the public-house is thrown open, and Israel Patch comes forth, leading another horse ready caparisoned. If not quite so elegant in its appearance as the dark chestnut, the relay-courser is but little inferior, and gives promise of no mean capacity for the work that is to be done. Few and rapid are the words which pass between Lady Bess and Israel Patch, and the moment her own steed is conducted into the stable, she bids him bring her forth a draught of ale, a command which he loses no time to obey. The Amazon drinks but a portion of the tankard's foaming contents; then springing upon the fresh steed, away she flies again.

"Twenty-nine miles hence to Boughton," she exclaims aloud, "and I must do the distance within a few minutes of two hours. Yes, it can be done, it shall be done," she cries, with enhancing exultation, as she is now well assured of the capabilities and powers of the steed which she at present bestrides.

The sun has risen, light has broken with gradual step upon the earth, and breathed the breath of life into the hitherto pulseless veins of slumber-locked creation. The orb of day breaks out in glory upon the world, nature is wakening from her trance, but all the night-dews remain upon her breast, like sparkling gems on the bosom of an Oriental sultana aroused by the break of morning from the voluptuous cushions whereon she has reposed.

The loveliness of the scene, the freshness of the morn, the gay carolling of the birds, the myriad tiny voices in which the insect world was speaking, all had the effect of elevating Lady Bess's spirits to the highest point. Onward speeds the horse. By Heaven, she begins to think that its powers, its energies, its action are all equal to those of her own gallant dark chestnut. Now she reins him in for a

"THE AMAZON DRINKS BUT A PORTION"
Pic. Oil painting from original by Varnali

"THE AMAZON DRINKS BUT A PORTION"
Photogravure from original by Merrill

moment to walk him through a roadside pond, and twice she leaped down to wash his mouth with a bunch of long grass damp with the pearly dew. He seems to recognize these attentions, to know that he is made much of, and also to be aware that he has a duty to perform in return. Yes, for a specific task is set. That good steed must be at Boughton ere the hand of his rider's watch marks the hour of six. On, on, then, there is not an instant to lose. On, on! Ah! the goal is in view, there is the tall sign-post, and in a few moments more the panting steed halts in front of the Red Dragon. Again does Lady Bess look at her watch. Bravo! it still wants ten minutes to six o'clock.

At the public-house which she has now reached a fresh horse is in readiness. The man Dean has not neglected the message delivered through the agency of the carrier-pigeon. A few rapid words are exchanged, another sip of ale taken, and away speeds Lady Bess on the last stage of her journey. Nineteen miles are before her. It will take an hour and a quarter to accomplish that distance, but she will enter Dover a few minutes after seven o'clock.

Away she speeds, four miles are soon dashed over, and then she reaches the outskirts of Canterbury. But as at this hour many persons are astir, and she does not choose to court observation, she makes a slight circuit so as to avoid passing through the place altogether. She knows all that part of the country well, each lane, each turning, and in a few minutes does she emerge upon the highroad again on the furthermost outskirts of Canterbury. The relay-steed which she obtained at the Red Dragon was equal to the former, equal, too, as near as might be, to her own, and thus she gallops on like the wind. Without impediment, but in exultation, in almost frenzied joy, in a perfect delirium of delight, is mile after mile passed over, and now at length the towering heights and gloomy fortalice of Dover Castle break upon her view.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" her voice rings out in swelling harmony to the breeze that already seems fresh with the salt taste derived from the sea.

Dover is reached. She looks at her watch again; it is ten minutes past seven. She has ridden from the northern outskirts of London in five hours and a half.

Immediately on her arrival at the Admiral's Head, Lady

Bess was hurried up-stairs by Kate Marshall and her sisters to a bedchamber, and there the three young women embraced her in the enthusiasm of admiration for the feat which she had performed. They then assisted to disapparel her of her male garments, and Lady Bess was by no means sorry to stretch her stiff and wearied limbs in the comfortable couch. Kate sat down by the bedside, and explained to her the stratagem which her father had adopted the moment the carrier-bird brought the despatch upwards of four hours previously. One of her sisters hastened down-stairs to procure breakfast for the intrepid traveller, while the other sister bustled about to put the masculine garments out of the way, and substitute for them a female garb which Kate's wardrobe furnished; and as the elder Miss Marshall was nearly as possible of the same height and figure as Lady Bess, there was no fear of the raiment proving unsuitable. The bottle of medicine which had been procured from Mr. Hood's assistant was emptied, and then conspicuously placed on the table near the bed, just as if its contents had been duly imbibed by her whose name appeared on the label.

Breakfast was speedily brought up, and Lady Bess did most ample justice to it. By the time she had finished her meal and the things were cleared away, it was eight o'clock, and in order to render the stratagem in respect to the surgeon as complete as possible, old Marshall stepped down the street to fetch him.

In a few minutes Mr. Hood was duly escorted by Mrs. Marshall into the pretended invalid's chamber. The surgeon was a middle-aged man, of rather a benevolent countenance, and of pleasing address. He had been long established in Dover and was much respected. If he had a fault, it was in a certain sneaking affection which he cherished for money, and therefore when he observed a well-filled purse lying upon the table close by his empty bottle, he could not help feeling pleased at having a patient evidently so well able to remunerate him for his services.

Lady Bess put on the most lugubrious look it was possible for her handsome and healthy countenance to assume; and if the doctor had only seen her playing so fine a part with the breakfast, a quarter of an hour previous, he would assuredly have fancied that a lady possessed of

such an appetite must be endowed with an iron constitution.

"Well, how are we this morning?" he asked, in his blandest tones, as he took Lady Bess's hand. "Pulse somewhat feverish, eh?"

Lady Bess thought that Mr. Hood's pulse would be very likely to beat quickly if he had ridden nearly eighty miles in five hours and a half; but though she experienced an almost irresistible inclination to burst out into the merriest laugh, she nevertheless so far controlled herself as to subdue that desire and modulate her voice into faint and languid tones, as she said, "I feel somewhat better now, doctor. But I was very, very ill in the night, and I feared that the fit was coming on just now again when the landlord went to fetch you."

"Ah! you must have another draught," said Mr. Hood. "No appetite, I suppose?"

"Not in the least," answered Lady Bess; and she thought it would be very odd if she had, after the quantities of cold fowl, ham, and buttered toast she had partaken of within the past half-hour.

"Well, you must have a little gruel presently, with a piece of dry toast," said Mr. Hood.

"I am convinced I never should be able to take it," rejoined Lady Bess; and Kate Marshall turned away to the window in order to prevent herself from bursting out into a laugh in the doctor's face.

"Oh, you must take some sustenance," exclaimed Mr. Hood, "but of a light character, for you are still feverish. When did this indisposition commence?"

"The lady arrived here last evening about seven o'clock," Mrs. Marshall hastened to observe, "and she complained very soon afterward, didn't she, Kate?"

"Yes, mother," was the response given by the eldest daughter.

"And then it was a little after three in the morning, I suppose, that you got so bad, ma'am?" said the doctor, addressing his patient, "for I learn from my assistant that it was about that time he was rung up."

"I really took no note of the hour," answered Lady Bess, "but I know that I had been suffering ever since I went to bed, before the fit seized upon me."

Mr. Hood remained a few minutes longer with his patient, asking her certain requisite questions, or, we should rather say, certain questions which he considered requisite; and then he took his leave, promising to send another draught in the course of the forenoon, and desiring that he might be fetched if any change should take place in her condition.

When the doctor had fairly quitted the room, Lady Bess gave vent to her long pent-up mirth in peals of the most joyous laughter, wherein she was joined by Kate, who remained with her, Mrs. Marshall having left the room with the doctor to escort him down-stairs.

"And how do you really feel?" inquired Kate, when the paroxysm of that convulsive merriment was over.

"I feel somewhat tired and stiff," responded Lady Bess, wiping away the tears which had rolled down her cheeks in the excess of her mirth, "but in all other respects I never was better, and certainly never happier. I am not one, my dear Kate, who, after an extraordinary exhilaration of the spirits, receives a reaction leading into a proportionate despondency. I am pretty nearly always the same, sometimes more elated, perhaps, but very seldom, if ever, depressed. And now let me give you the history of that pleasant little adventure of mine which has compelled me to perform this feat."

The Amazon thereupon recounted the incidents of the previous night, which are already known to the reader, and Kate laughed heartily at her friend's ludicrous description of the discomfiture which the two lawyers had experienced.

"Now, I do not think they are positively vindictive," added Lady Bess, "but they are keen, sharp fellows, and have got it into their heads that, being lawyers, they must vindicate what is called the majesty of the law. So, it is highly probable that they will have instituted a hue and cry, or else a chase after me. Perhaps, even, they may make their appearance in Dover presently, in the idea that I shall endeavour to escape into France. Well, let them come. I most cordially hope they will, for it is better to have the thing examined into down here and have done with it, than have to wait till I return to London and then send for all you as witnesses. But what time is the first train down?"

"About eleven o'clock for the French mails," replied Kate.

" And it is now about half-past eight," said Lady Bess, referring to her watch which lay upon the table by the bedside. " Well, I can at least reckon upon two or three hours' good sleep."

" For which purpose I will therefore leave you," said Kate; but as she was about to open the door, she turned around, and with an arch smile upon her very good-looking countenance, said, " Shall I bring you up the gruel and toast at eleven? "

" Rather say a good luncheon, my dear friend," responded Lady Bess, with another merry laugh; and then, as Kate Marshall closed the door, the female highwayman turned around in her couch and composed herself off to sleep as calmly and tranquilly as if there were not even the remotest chance of being brought into collision with the authorities.

CHAPTER XX

THE RESULT

It was a little after midday when a short, elderly, bustling gentleman, accompanied by one of the Dover police constables, entered the Admiral's Head, and proceeding straight up to the bar, inquired for the landlord. Old Marshall, who from the window of his parlour behind the bar immediately observed the visitors, and of course guessed their errand, came forth with the coolest self-possession imaginable, and the police officer at once said, "Mr. Marshall, we want to have a few minutes' conversation with you, if you please."

"To be sure; step in here," responded the landlord, and he accordingly admitted the bustling gentleman and the constable into the bar-parlour, where his wife and three daughters were seated. "But if it's private," the old man immediately exclaimed, "we can go into another room."

The constable looked at Mr. Marlow, — for he the gentleman was, — for him to give an answer, and the London solicitor at once said, "I presume these ladies are of your family?"

"My wife and daughters, sir," responded old Marshall.

"Then there can be no harm in my putting before them the questions which I have to ask. In a word, do you happen to have an individual, or, to be more explicit, a woman in male attire, beneath your roof?"

"Well, I never!" whispered Miss Kate to her sisters, but purposely loud enough to be heard by the lawyer and constable.

"A what, sir?" exclaimed old Marshall, affecting the utmost astonishment.

"Well, then, I see that she is not here," observed Mr.

Marlow, turning to the constable. "This is the eighth or ninth tavern we have visited, and everywhere the same negative answer. But I am determined to inquire at all the taverns in Dover, sooner than give up the chase."

"But why do you persist in thinking, sir," asked the constable, "that she is in Dover?"

"I have no reason beyond my belief that she will try and get over to France. However, we have set a watch for the railway trains —"

At this moment the doctor's boy made his appearance at the bar, and depositing a bottle on the counter, shouted out, "Mrs. Chandos!" and then hurried away to deliver the remaining contents of his basket.

"Mrs. Chandos?" ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "By Heaven, it is she!"

"Yes, sir," old Marshall promptly observed, "there is a lady of that name in the house."

"Enough, enough!" cried the excitable attorney. "Show us up to her room. Come along, constable, the bird's caught at last," and he was already rushing with frantic haste out of the bar when old Marshall's voice called him back.

"Where are you going, sir, and with this constable, too? The lady is in bed and ill. But is there anything wrong about her? I'm sure I took her for a most respectable person."

"Wrong about her? Respectable person?" ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "Why, she's a robber, a thief!"

"Good heavens, girls," shrieked forth Mrs. Marshall, "do go and count the plate. A thief did you say, sir?"

"Yes, but a most daring thief, too, a highwayman, or, rather, a highway-woman."

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Marshall, appearing to be dreadfully alarmed. "Only think of our having had such a desperate character in the house all night."

"It's fortunate we have not every one had our throats cut," said Kate, making herself shudder from head to foot, while her two sisters likewise gave vent to their pretended feelings of terror and dismay.

"Oh, if she's all that," said old Marshall, "the sooner she's out of the house the better. Go up, one of you girls, and show this gentleman and the constable which is her

room. But I hope she will pay her bill, though, and her doctor's, too, for that matter."

"There must be some mistake," said Mr. Marlow, who for the last few moments had been looking quite bewildered. "One of you talked of her having slept here all night. Why, she can't have been in the house above an hour or two, even if she travelled post the whole way from London, for we know she didn't come by the railway. We have already made inquiries about her there."

"There must be some mistake, then," said old Marshall, "for the Mrs. Chandos we are talking of has been here ever since six or seven o'clock last evening."

"Then it's not the same," ejaculated Marlow. "How singular a coincidence of names! But what sort of a looking woman is she? The Mrs. Chandos I mean must be about six and twenty, though when dressed as a man she of course looks several years younger. Complexion, delicate olive, a rich colour on the cheeks, large black eyes, very bright black hair, beautifully curling, full lips, the least thing coarse, splendid teeth, stands about five feet ten, I should think, excellent figure, upright as a dart, and fine voice, strong for a woman but not harsh."

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Kate, knowing that Lady Bess wanted to be arrested at Dover so as to get the affair terminated in that town, "this description exactly answers the lady up-stairs."

"The deuce it does!" quickly ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "Then I am on the right scent again. But she didn't come in male attire?"

"Oh, no, sir," responded Kate, with an indignant toss of the head, "or I am sure that she wouldn't have been received into this house. The constable there can tell you that the Admiral's Head is of the highest respectability."

"Yes, miss, that I will warrant," remarked the officer who had received many a gratuitous drink at the bar of the establishment.

"Well, well, I meant no offence, young lady," quickly rejoined Mr. Marlow. "But do let us endeavour to clear up one point. When did this lady arrive?"

"It was between six and seven last evening, sir," answered Kate, "as we have already told you."

"Yes," immediately observed old Marshall, opening an

account-book, " here's the entries of what she has had. Tea, supper, bed, and breakfast."

" Which last she didn't touch though," added Kate, " because she's so ill."

" So ill indeed," observed old Marshall, " that I was called up in the middle of the night to go to the doctor and get her a draught."

" What o'clock was that? " demanded Mr. Marlow, quickly.

" What o'clock? " responded the landlord, appearing to reflect, " why, I should think about three in the morning."

" Yes, it was just three," immediately interjected Kate, " because I had been sitting up with the poor lady."

" Oh, then decidedly it is not the Mrs. Chandos I mean," said Mr. Marlow, wonderfully perplexed and bewildered. " And yet that extraordinary likeness which appears to exist — But I say, is it possible that I could obtain a glimpse of this Mrs. Chandos of yours without giving her any offence, supposing that it is really not the same? "

" I will go up and see whether she is dressed," said Kate. Then suddenly appearing to hesitate, she exclaimed, with a frightened look, " But if it should be the highway-woman after all — "

" Then the sooner we get rid of her the better," replied old Marshall. " Come, this thing must be cleared up for our sakes."

" To be sure, to be sure! " exclaimed Mr. Marlow.

" At all events she can't eat you, Kate," said her father.

" Well, I will go," cried the young woman, as if mustering up all her courage.

She accordingly issued from the bar-parlour, and, proceeding up-stairs, went at once to Lady Bess's room. This heroine had risen about half an hour previously, much refreshed by a sound and uninterrupted sleep. She had nearly finished her toilet, and was just putting on the gown which Kate had supplied her in addition to all other requisite articles of female raiment, when the young woman herself thus made her appearance.

" You needn't tell me what it is that has brought you," said Lady Bess, laughing, " for I see by your countenance that the crisis is at hand."

Miss Marshall forthwith explained everything that had just taken place below; but somewhat apprehensive as to

the result, and entertaining a very sincere friendship for Lady Bess, she said to her, "Now, my dear Elizabeth, if you really are at all uncertain about the possible ending of this adventure, do for Heaven's sake let me get you out of the house unperceived."

"My dear girl," exclaimed Lady Bess, taking Kate's hand and clasping it warmly, "do I look like a person who entertains any alarm on the subject? Quite the contrary. I am rejoiced that what I wanted to occur has so speedily taken place. And now tell me, how do your garments seem to fit me?"

"Perfectly well," replied Kate, altogether cheered and encouraged by the tone of confidence in which Lady Bess had spoken.

The Amazonian lady surveyed herself in a full-length mirror when Kate had fastened her dress, and the reflection of the image which she beheld on the polished surface of that glass was one whereof she might well be proud. Lady Bess now appeared as a most splendid woman. Her commanding height was relieved by the fine developments of her form, the closely fitting dress setting off the rich, feminine contours to the utmost advantage. It was true that so far as her features were concerned, they now appeared largely chiseled and therefore somewhat coarse; but it was impossible to gaze upon those splendid dark eyes, the richness of those moist and luscious lips, the teeth faultlessly even and without the faintest blemish, and the nose of perfect straightness, without being compelled to admit that if the sweetness of beauty were not there, yet that the countenance was one of a strikingly handsome appearance.

Inasmuch as to suit her male apparel Lady Bess had been accustomed to wear her hair somewhat short, — that is to say, long for a man, but short for a woman, — she had now made the most of it by arranging it in bands; and in its extraordinary luxuriance it seemed that if let loose it would flow down in the richest redundancy upon her shoulders. Shining in its rich natural glossiness, that magnificent raven hair was parted above the high and open forehead which seemed capable of enthroning the noblest thoughts.

From her waist down to her feet the flowing skirt of her dress afforded indications of the sweeping length of those limbs which the drapery now concealed, but as she turned

away from the mirror, a glimpse was allowed of the well-rounded ankles, and the admirably shaped feet with their arching insteps. Altogether she was a superb creature, and pity it was that she was what she was.

"Now, have you furnished me with a bonnet, shawl, gloves, parasol, and all those kind of things?" she inquired, with a merry laugh flowing in the flutelike tones of her melodious voice.

"Everything is here," responded Kate, pointing to a chair in the corner where the articles which Lady Bess mentioned had been deposited. "I have chosen the things from my own wardrobe that I thought would best suit your complexion, figure, and appearance. Do let me congratulate you upon your looks in that garb."

"You like me better, then, as I am now than in the other dress?" said the Amazonian lady.

"Yes, I think I do, and yet there is something so dashing and fine in your man's apparel. But you must not put on the bonnet and shawl now. Remember that you are an invalid — on gruel and dry toast," added Kate Marshall, in a merry voice. "Seriously speaking, however, what are you going to do?"

"See Mr. Marlow, to be sure," at once responded Lady Bess. "Now show me to your best furnished private apartment, Kate, and I will lie down upon the sofa with as languishing an air of interesting indisposition as I can possibly assume. Then you can introduce Mr. Marlow."

"But upon what pretence?" inquired Kate, "for he scarcely believes now, I think, that our Mrs. Chandos is his Mrs. Chandos."

"Tell him that you have very candidly explained to me as much as you thought fit of all that has taken place down-stairs, and that I at once, with equal candour, informed you who I am, namely, Mrs. Chandos residing at the cottage near Tottenham in the neighbourhood of London. Then he is sure to take the business before the mayor, and that is just what I want."

"Come then, Elizabeth," said Kate Marshall, and she forthwith conducted the heroine to a well-furnished parlour on the same story as the bedchamber where this colloquy took place.

Having seen the heroine deposit herself with the air of an

invalid upon the sofa, Kate sped down-stairs and returned to the bar-parlour.

"Well," cried Mr. Marlow, with that nervous excitement which was habitual to him, "what have you done?"

"I very candidly informed Mrs. Chandos," returned Kate, "that a solicitor from London and a police officer belonging to this town had come to inquire for a lady of the same name, and that the lady thus inquired for was represented to be a highway-woman."

"And what did she say?" demanded Mr. Marlow.

"She looked indignant at first, when she thought that allusion was made to herself," continued Kate, "but when I assured her that no one had positively charged her with being the highway-woman thus alluded to, she ceased to be angry. Then, of her own accord, she at once declared that so far as she herself was concerned she was a highly respectable lady, of independent means, and living on the outskirts of London somewhere near Tottenham, I think she said, or Edmonton."

"Then, by Heaven! it must be the same, after all!" cried Mr. Marlow. "Tottenham and Edmonton join each other. But go on. What else took place?"

"The lady, with the utmost candour," rejoined Kate, "requests that you will walk up to her room, and take the officer with you, if you like."

"I shall most assuredly do so," exclaimed the solicitor. "Now, Miss Marshall, be pleased to lead the way."

Kate accordingly retraced her steps up-stairs, closely followed by Mr. Marlow and the constable. On reaching the parlour, Kate opened the door, and the very first glimpse which the keen-sighted attorney caught of Lady Bess, he cried, "It is the same, I know it is! Unless, indeed, she has a sister as like herself as one pea is like another. Pray, ma'am," he added, advancing toward Lady Bess, "have you a sister?"

"No, I have not, sir," she at once replied, raising herself up to a sitting posture on the sofa where she had previously been reclining.

Mr. Marlow surveyed her for nearly a minute with the most scrutinizing earnestness. He had seen her on many occasions riding about the neighbourhood of Edmonton and Tottenham in female attire, and he had likewise observed her very

attentively indeed on the preceding night, during the few minutes he and his partner were in her own elegantly furnished parlour at the cottage. Now, therefore, when he examined her from head to foot with the keenest scrutiny, observed her superb dark eyes, her strongly marked features, especially the rich fulness of the lips, when he noted, too, the figure, and calculated what must be the stature of this lady on whom he was now gazing, it was impossible he could come to any other conclusion than that he saw before him the female highwayman who had escaped from his clutches during the past night. Therefore, without pausing to reflect any longer upon the astounding evidence he had heard in the bar-parlour to disprove this identity, he suddenly exclaimed, " Well, I am decided. At all risks, I give this woman into custody."

" Me, sir, into custody! " exclaimed Lady Bess, with an indignation that was admirably assumed, and her eyes flashed fire upon the attorney.

" Yes, you," he answered. Then turning abruptly around toward the officer, he said, " Constable, do your duty."

" Ma'am, you must consider yourself in custody," said the police official to Lady Bess.

" Oh, very well," she exclaimed. " Whoever this gentleman is, — if a gentleman he be, — he shall smart for it. There is such a thing as an action for damages in this country."

" We will not bandy words here," said Mr. Marlow. " I suppose the case can be heard at once before the mayor. You can bring your prisoner along with you, and I will inquire my way to the town hall. We will go separately."

With these words Mr. Marlow put on his hat and whisked out of the room.

" Miss Marshall," said Lady Bess, addressing Kate in the presence of the constable, as if speaking to a stranger and an inferior, " fetch me my bonnet and shawl, for I can assure you that I am in as great a hurry to have this matter investigated as the individual who has just quitted the room can possibly be."

Kate accordingly repaired to fetch the things which Lady Bess required, and when our heroine had put on the pretty bonnet, and the new French shawl (never before worn) with which Kate likewise supplied her, she looked so superbly

handsome that the police officer could not help gazing upon her with admiration.

"As this is an affair," observed Kate, pretending to be very serious, "which, as my father says, to some little extent involves the respectability of his establishment, he and my mother, myself and sisters, are all going to the town hall."

"Very well, then, you can do as you like," exclaimed Lady Bess, affecting to be somewhat offended by the remark, "but I will proceed thither at once with the officer. Of course," she said, addressing herself to the constable, "you do not wish to subject me to any ignominious treatment, for I can assure you that this is all a mistake, and will speedily be cleared up."

The policeman naturally thought, from all he had heard in the bar, that it really was a mistake, and he had been much surprised at Mr. Marlow determining to give the lady into charge. Besides, when he looked at her he could not possibly fancy for a moment that a female with a certain elegant and fashionable air of distinction could be nothing more than a robber. He therefore assured the lady that he did not wish to subject her to the slightest inconvenience, and that if she would walk in front of him, he would keep at such a distance from her as to prevent the people in the streets from observing that she was in his custody. Therefore, ere quitting the tavern, he gave her a few directions which turnings to take so as to reach the town hall. These little arrangements being made, Lady Bess issued forth, the constable keeping in her track, but at an interval of a dozen or fifteen yards.

The town hall was reached, and Mr. Marlow, who had got there first, stopped the mayor from quitting the magisterial seat, as he was about to do, the morning's business being over. So quietly had the whole thing been managed that nothing of what was going on had got wind through the town, and there were consequently but very few loiterers in the court when Lady Bess was introduced to the presence of the magistrate. Almost immediately after her arrival, old Marshall and his family, accompanied by Mr. Hood and his assistant, made their appearance, for the tavern-keeper had called for the medical men on the way to the town hall, telling them what had occurred, and intimating that from all which had transpired in his own bar-parlour he thought

their evidence would be wanting. Of course Mr. Hood and the assistant were very much surprised to hear of their patient being in custody on such a serious charge, and they felt assured it must be some extraordinary mistake.

Lady Bess was compelled to enter the dock, the accusation being one of felony against her. But she sat down there with an aspect of calm dignity and of placid confidence, in which, however, there was not the slightest tinge of bravado nor unseemly hardihood. The Marshalls and the medical men placed themselves on a bench reserved for witnesses, while Mr. Marlow entered the witness-box.

The proceedings then commenced by the prosecutor being sworn. He stated that his name was Sidney Marlow, that he was a solicitor carrying on business in Parliament Street, Westminster, and that his private abode was at Edmonton, also in the county of Middlesex. He then proceeded to describe the circumstances of the attempted robbery, just as they are already known to the reader, not omitting the details of Lady Bess's escape from the cottage, that is to say, so far as he was acquainted with them.

At this stage of the proceedings the mayor, addressing Lady Bess, said, " The present is so very serious a charge that perhaps you would like to have the case remanded in order that you may procure the assistance of counsel? " and as he spoke he could not help gazing upon the prisoner in astonishment blended with compassionate interest, for he naturally felt both surprised and grieved that a female of such a prepossessing appearance should have placed herself in what seemed to be a most threatening dilemma.

" I thank your worship for this kind suggestion on your part," answered Lady Bess, " but I think that after your worship has heard a statement which the landlord of the Admiral's Head can make, and which all his family can corroborate, you will perceive that I shall have no need for any legal advice."

" Then let Mr. Marshall stand forward," said the mayor.

The landlord of the Admiral's Head, with the blunt, honest look that was characteristic of him, and which was calculated to deceive the Evil One himself, stood up and was sworn.

" Now, Mr. Marshall," said Lady Bess, " will you have the

kindness to tell his worship at what hour I arrived at your establishment? "

"It was between six and seven o'clock last evening," responded Marshall, with imperturbable gravity.

The mayor was evidently struck with astonishment, and turning toward Mr. Marlow, he said, "At what hour of the past night was it that your carriage was stopped in the manner you have described? "

"It must have been, as near as I can guess, close upon one o'clock," replied the solicitor.

"Then, do you not clearly see," asked the mayor, "that a perfect alibi is proven? "

"I confess, your worship, that I am bewildered," responded Mr. Marlow. "But I should like this young lady " — pointing to Kate — "to be sworn."

"To be sure," said the mayor. "Miss Marshall, stand forward."

Kate, with as much resoluteness and self-possession as her father had just shown, stepped into the witness-box and unhesitatingly took the oath.

"Now, Miss Marshall," said Mr. Marlow, "what communication did the prisoner make to you relative to her place of abode? "

"She told me, sir," was the response, "that she lived at a cottage somewhere near Tottenham and Edmonton."

"And your worship will observe," exclaimed Mr. Marlow, "that it was at a cottage near Edmonton and Tottenham whence the prisoner, as I maintain, escaped from me in the manner I have described. I submit that the identity is proven."

"At what o'clock, Mr. Marlow," asked Lady Bess, "do you allege that I escaped from you? You have stated that the attack upon your carriage was made about a quarter to one. Will you be kind enough to mention how long afterward it was that the escape took place? "

"About an hour afterward," responded Marlow. "It was getting on for two."

"At which hour, your worship," said Lady Bess, "I was lying in bed very ill at the tavern kept by Mr. Marshall in Dover. I therefore leave it to your worship to decide whether I could have been at the cottage near London and at the hotel in Dover at one and the same time."

" I think, your worship," said Mr. Hood's assistant, now stepping forward, " that I can give some important evidence in the matter, for though I never saw the prisoner at the bar before in my life, yet I would not for the world remain silent when the character and liberty of a fellow creature are at stake."

The assistant was accordingly sworn, and he deposed that shortly after three o'clock in the morning he had been rung up by Mr. Marshall, to furnish a composing draught for a lady who was lying ill at the Admiral's Head, that he was told the lady's name was Mrs. Chandos, and that he had written that name on the label accordingly.

Mr. Hood now also requested to be sworn, and this being done, he deposed that at eight o'clock in the morning he had visited Mrs. Chandos, the prisoner at the bar, at the hotel, that he had seen her there, and was confident she was the same lady who now stood in the dock.

" This is the most extraordinary case," said the mayor, " that ever came before me. Mr. Marshall, you are quite positive that the prisoner arrived at your house last evening between six and seven o'clock? "

" I am as certain, your worship, as that I am now addressing you," was the reply. " My wife and daughters can all prove it. And here," he added, producing a day-book, " are the entries of what the lady had at the hotel. Your worship will perceive that there are entries of tea and supper under yesterday's date. I make up this book every night before I go to bed."

The book was handed up to the mayor, who examined the items, and then turning to Mr. Marlow, he said, " Really, sir, I think you ought to be satisfied that this is a case of mistaken identity. Has the lady a sister at all resembling her? "

" That, your worship," responded the attorney, " was the very question I put to her in the presence of the constable, and she emphatically replied in the negative. Now, observe, your worship, the woman who made the attempted robbery on me and my partner told me her name was Mrs. Chandos, and the prisoner at the bar says she is Mrs. Chandos. Again, the woman who attempted the robbery took me to a cottage which has been described, and the woman at the bar admits that she lives at that cottage. Then again, I have often seen

the woman who attempted to rob me riding about Edmonton; I also scrutinized her well, between one and two o'clock this morning, when she had on her male attire, and I am convinced that the woman at the bar is the same that I have seen riding about Edmonton and whom I beheld in male attire during the past night. Therefore I maintain that, so far as I am concerned, I have proved the identity.

"I confess that I am staggered and even bewildered by the counter-evidence that has been given, and without for a single instant impeaching the veracity of the Marshalls, of Mr. Hood, or of his assistant, I can only say that if the woman at the bar is not the female highwayman who attempted to rob me and my partner, then from this time forth I shall not be able to put faith in the evidence of my own senses. Under all the circumstances, I think your worship will admit that this is a case which ought to be sent before a superior tribunal, and therefore I ask your worship to direct that the prisoner at the bar be sent up to London in charge of some officer of your court, with a view to a further investigation before the magistrate of the district in which the felony was committed. And before I conclude I will observe that a great responsibility rests upon the shoulders of your worship at the present moment, because if your worship refuses my demand, the proceedings must drop altogether here, as I should feel too disgusted and have too little confidence in the force of truth — and I may also say in the evidences of my own senses — to have the case reopened or the investigation renewed elsewhere. Therefore, as the fairest course which can be adopted, and that there may be no chance of a guilty person escaping punishment in consequence of testimony of a somewhat inexplicable nature, I repeat my demand that the prisoner be sent up to London."

"I have little trouble," said the mayor, after a few minutes' consultation with his clerk, "in giving my judgment in this matter. There are two views that may be taken of the case. Firstly, it is shown by the evidence of a most respectable hotel-keeper of this town that the prisoner at the bar arrived at his house by seven o'clock last evening, and granting that fact to be established, it is totally impossible the prisoner could have committed the assault upon the prosecutor in the middle of the night. Secondly, we have the

evidence of a gentleman of unquestionable veracity, Mr. Hood, that he saw the prisoner at the bar at the hotel this morning at eight o'clock. Now, even setting aside Mr. Marshall's evidence altogether, can we suppose that the prisoner, if she had escaped from the cottage near London at a little before two in the morning, could have been at Dover at eight? There was no railway train by which she could arrive. Had she travelled post the whole distance, which I compute to be from Edmonton to Dover nearly eighty miles, she could not have done it in the time. As for her performing such a journey on horseback in so short a period, the idea is out of the question. Such a feat could only be accomplished by frequent relays, ordered and arranged beforehand, for to obtain several consecutive changes of horses at such hours, when roadside inns are all shut up and their inmates asleep, would occasion a waste of time far beyond what can enter into the present computation. In addition, however, to the evidence of Mr. Marshall, proving that the lady was at his hotel at seven o'clock last evening, and to that of Mr. Hood, proving that she was there at eight this morning, we have the circumstantial evidence spoken to by the assistant, proving that she was there soon after three this morning. Therefore, taking all these facts into consideration, I can only come to one conclusion, namely, that it is a case of mistaken identity under very extraordinary circumstances, and I have no alternative but to declare the alibi most satisfactorily established, and to discharge the prisoner from custody."

Mr. Marlow slapped his hand violently down upon the ledge of the witness-box, and exclaimed, " Well, sir, I can scarcely blame you for the decision to which you have come, considering all that has transpired, and here, therefore, the matter drops. But in future I shall believe in nothing I hear, see, or touch. If anybody tells me at noonday that the sun is shining, I shall answer that it may possibly be so, but it is not certain."

Having thus spoken with excited volubility, Mr. Marlow bowed to the mayor and hurried out of the court.

Lady Bess then returned to the Admiral's Head in company with her friends, and immediately on their arrival at the tavern, Mr. Hood earnestly counselled her to take her composing draught and go to bed, or the excitement which she had undergone would be very likely to bring back her

hysterical fits. The Amazonian lady promised to follow this advice, but so soon as the surgeon and his assistant had taken their leave, she sat down to an excellent luncheon with the Marshalls, and heartily did they all laugh at the discomfiture of the bustling Mr. Marlow.

Before we conclude this chapter, we must give a few requisite explanations. The scrap of paper, written by Lady Bess, and sent by the carrier-pigeon, contained the following lines:

" Stations, horses.
" Dover, do something to prove I was at your house this night.
" Twenty minutes to two."

The first line was a command merely referring to the two stations of Gravesend and Boughton Hill; the second, by having the word Dover prefixed, showed that this portion of the message was intended for the Marshalls; the third indicated the exact time when the bird was despatched. At Gravesend Rebecca Patch made a cross on the billet, to show that the bird had halted at one station; at Boughton Hill Joe Dean did the same thing, as an indication that the second station had been touched at. If, for instance, the bird had reached Boughton Hill without proof that it had stopped at Gravesend, Joe Dean would have still let it proceed on to Dover, but would have at once despatched a carrier dove of his own to Gravesend to give the order for the relay-horse that was needed; and if the bird had reached Dover without the proofs (indicated by the two marks on the scrap of paper) of having stopped at the intermediate stations, then Kate Marshall would have sent the bird back with another note conveying the requisite orders for the relays.

With regard to the secret of the writing, the clue to the reading thereof depended, as a matter of course, upon a preconcerted arrangement and understanding known to all the parties concerned; and the clue to the mystery lay in the possession of the key to a certain transposition of the alphabet. Each day in the year 1844 had its particular initial letter thus definitely settled, and we have seen that on the present occasion the letter L served that purpose. This letter, then, became for the occasion the first in the alphabet.

Our meaning can be better conveyed by placing in juxtaposition the proper alphabet and the alphabet according to which Lady Bess's note was written:

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z a b c d e f g h i j k

Thus *l* served for *a*, *m* for *b*, *n* for *c*, and so on. We must likewise observe that instead of the capital letter I, when expressing the first person, a star (*) was used in the hieroglyphic calligraphy.

CHAPTER XXI

BEHIND THE SCENES

The lounger through the opera colonnades in the Haymarket and Pall Mall can scarcely form a conception of the vast magnitude of the establishment by which he is passing; nor when the house is crowded of an evening, do those present, unless previously initiated, entertain the slightest idea of the multiplicity of the appliances and the complication of the machinery requisite to produce all the scenic effects which they behold upon the stage.

With regard to the size of the establishment, it is enormous, and in addition to the performers, furnishes employment for an almost countless host of persons who are never seen within the sphere of that blaze of light which fills the place when open to the public. The approaches to the vast amphitheatre, the corridors and staircases, the crush-rooms, where the visitors wait for their carriages when the performance is over, the refreshment-saloon, the enormous theatre itself, capable of containing three thousand persons, and the stage, with its ample width and still greater depth, all these compartments of the premises, which are familiar to the visitor, fill up an enormous space. But in addition to those parts of the building which are thus well known, there are others which help to swell the magnitude of the edifice. For example, there are the private apartments in which the lessee and other authorities of the place may live entirely if they choose; there are numerous offices where clerks conduct the business matters of the establishment in as regular and laborious a manner as in any great mercantile firm of the City; and in the precincts of the stage there are the numerous dressing-rooms for the performers, whether belonging to the opera or ballet. The leading characters of

either department enjoy the privilege of separate dressing-rooms, but the minor performers dress three or four in a chamber, a due regard to the distinction of the sexes being of course maintained. There is an immense concert-room belonging to the building, and which in itself is larger than many of the minor theatres. Then there is the scene-painters' room, a place of considerable extent and of great height, as may be imagined from the extent of canvas that has to be spread out for the purpose of designing and colouring. There is the room where the theatrical properties are kept, comprising all the costumes and the various articles which have to be introduced on the stage to suit particular performances. Moreover, immense space is required for the mechanism of which we shall almost immediately have to speak; and thus from this mere fleeting and imperfect glance at the principal departments and divisions of the establishment some idea may be formed of its magnitude.

But at night, when the vast amphitheatre is one blaze of light and crowded with spectators from pit to roof, how few who are then present can form an idea of the mechanical power that is brought to bear upon all those shifting scenes which produce such splendid effects upon the stage. Perhaps it is a beautiful landscape which is thus represented, with trees and fields and water and houses, and with the clouds above, but all the various portions of painted canvas that enter into the formation of that scenery are moved and put into their place by means of countless ropes and numbers of wheels, levers, and windlasses, so that to the eye of the visitor who is allowed to peep behind those scenes it appears as if he were on board an immense ship and involved amidst the complications of its rigging. What hosts of carpenters and scene-shifters are likewise employed in the management and execution of all those arrangements which are thus unseen, and the extent of which is little suspected by the brilliant company sitting in front of the footlights! Underneath the stage it is apparently one confused and jumbled mass of mechanism, beams, posts, wheels, levers, and all imaginable contrivances for trap-doors, drops, and the numerous other artifices, devices, and ingenious arrangements which often produce such startling effects to the eyes of the audience.

From those dark profundities beneath the stage, high up

to the very summit of the building, far above what appears to the spectators to be the top of the stage, a circular iron staircase winds its way, only just wide enough for one individual to thread it at a time, and during the performance constant communications are kept up between the persons above and the persons below. Then, when scenes are to be shifted, all is haste and bustle, yet no confusion. Every one has his allotted task, every one knows what he has to do. But still the brilliant ladies lounging in their boxes, and the fashionable elegants whispering soft nonsense in their ears during the brief intervals of the scenes or the longer ones between the acts, little imagine the amount of activity which is prevailing behind the curtain, from the depths under the stage to the heights to which the iron staircase leads, in order that the next scene on which that curtain shall rise may be presented with an accuracy so as to produce the most perfect effect.

Such is the opera, a little world in itself, and the management of which involves an expense so enormous that it is no wonder lessees require high prices and well-filled houses in order to maintain it. And when we pause to reflect upon the colossal salaries that are exacted by the stars of the song or the dance, when we count the numbers of musicians in the orchestra and the hosts of minor characters who appear upon the stage, remembering that all must be paid certain salaries, be they lesser or greater, we cannot fail to be struck by the enormity of the whole outlay required, and the commensurate risk that has to be run on the part of the speculative individual who undertakes the management of the opera.

There is no apartment at this establishment bearing the name of the greenroom, as at the great national theatres. Certain noblemen and aristocratic fashionables have the privilege of passing behind the scenes, and in the precincts thereof they lounge and loiter about on the nights of performance, chatting with the ballet-girls, and dispensing their platitudes, their impertinences, or their flippancies to those of the female *artistes* who come in their way. But few of the opera-dancers, when beheld close, display even the shadow of the charms which they appear to possess when viewed from a distance. They are, for the most part, exceedingly thin, for it must be remembered that they invari-

ably practise for several hours each day. The ballet-master is almost constantly in attendance, and if a visitor, escorted by some official of the establishment, peeps into the place any time between eleven in the forenoon and five in the evening, he will see a bevy of those girls dancing, pirouetting, bounding, and practising other saltatory exploits upon the stage, to the notes of a violin. This constant exercise therefore keeps the dancers thin, and renders many of them positively emaciated. Theirs is the hardest life, theirs the most wearing toil, of any amongst the theatrical contingents. Then, too, though the stars of the ballet are handsomely remunerated, the ordinary dancers are but indifferently paid, the lowest in rank wretchedly enough. When the performance is over, these ill-paid creatures may be seen issuing forth from the hot and feverish atmosphere of the theatre, having just thrown off their gauzy raiment and huddled on their own clothing, too often poor and scant even to wretchedness; and thus from that torrid region they emerge into the chill of the night air, perhaps to face a deluging rain, or at some seasons a nipping frost. Their health suffers, their constitutions are undermined, and thus with the constant wear and tear of practice, and these liabilities to sudden variations of atmosphere, with their accompanying rheums and coughs, whatever personal beauty the ballet-girl may have originally possessed soon wanes, fades, and disappears. Some of them, too, with sorrow be it said, lead a course of life which is of a nature to aggravate all the above-mentioned evils; and thus, when viewed close, they are very different from what they appear to be when seen from the house, bounding amidst a blaze of light upon the elastic boards of the stage. That bloom which appears to rest so naturally upon their cheeks as they are thus viewed from a distance looks but a mere daub when beheld close, a thick coat of rouge, yet not always so thick as to prevent the haggard traits of the countenance from appearing through.

But we will not extend this picture to a length intruding upon the current of our tale. Having ere now stated that there is no greenroom at the opera-house in the Haymarket, we may observe that at the time of which we are writing the concert-room above mentioned sometimes served as a lounge for the performers, and likewise for those privileged

aristocrats and fashionables who penetrated behind the scenes.

One evening, a week after the incidents related in the preceding chapters, the concert-room was more than usually crowded by such visitors. The opera performed that night was "I Puritani," and during an interval between the acts, Grisi, Lablache, and other eminent *artistes* engaged at the establishment were gathered in a group conversing together in that concert-room. Dispersed about were the other performers in the opera, and likewise the dancers in attendance upon the ballet. Although we have stated that as a general rule the ballet-girls will not bear a very close inspection, or at least that such near view is likely to produce some feeling of disappointment, yet there are of course exceptions to this rule, and a few beautiful creatures may be seen amongst them. Nor was it otherwise on the night to which we are specially referring, and those who were best-looking, as a matter of course, engrossed the principal share of attention on the part of the privileged loungers from outside. Rest assured, reader, that Angela Vivaldi was not present in the concert-room. Though engaged to dance that evening, she remained in her own dressing-chamber until the appointed hour came, and then all intruders from before the curtain were compelled to retire. Such was her positive stipulation, and the rule was as rigorously observed as it could possibly be.

But Mademoiselle d'Alembert was very far from being so particular, and she was conspicuous amongst the stars of the dance congregated there. Apparelled in a Spanish dress, her fine figure was set off by that costume to the utmost advantage, so that the somewhat luxurious fulness of her shape was well displayed. She was not one who grew thin, much less emaciated, by her avocations, for being a thorough proficient in the dance, she practised but little, and having a carriage to convey her to or from the scene of her Terpsichorean displays, and good clothes to muffle herself up in, she ran no chance of impairing her health through colds and coughs. Having a table, too, well supplied with every luxury, and being addicted to gormandizing, she maintained herself in a comfortable condition of plumpness, though at the same time the most punctilious critic of female beauty would not have pronounced her too stout. She possessed

magnificent dark hair, a pair of fine bright eyes, with nobly arching brows, and a beautiful set of teeth. Thus, altogether, Emily Archer — or Emile d'Alembert, which was her theatrical pseudonym — was a very handsome and attractive young woman.

At the moment when we thus particularly notice her amidst the throng in the concert-room on the night in question, she was looking somewhat angry, inasmuch as young Lord Saxondale, who had promised to see her there that evening, had not as yet made his appearance. Several other gay gallants had accosted Miss Archer, but she gave them no encouragement to continue discoursing with her. The fact was, she was mightily pleased with her new conquest, knowing him to be the heir to immense estates on attaining his majority; and therefore she was too anxious to retain him in the silken chains of her fascination to risk losing him by a flirtation with other aspirants. Thus, if Miss Archer remained faithful to Lord Saxondale, — and meant to do so, as long as it suited her convenience, — it was through no love of him, but because her self-interest was gratified.

Suddenly her countenance brightened up as she beheld the young nobleman enter the concert-room; and nodding familiarly to three or four fashionable acquaintances whom he recognized, he passed amidst the throng and speedily joined Miss Emily Archer.

" How late you are to-night! " she said, affecting to pout her lips as she gave him her hand. " I thought you were not coming."

" My dear girl," responded Saxondale, " I was dining with my friend, Lord Harold Staunton, and a number of other men, and after dinner we had cards, so that really the time slipped away without my noticing it. But when I did see how late it was, I hurried off at once, and here I am. Now pray be so kind as to look as pleasant as you can."

" I will, since you have made an apology," answered Emily, who could judge pretty well from his manner that he had found the means of complying with a certain request she had made in the morning.

" There, now, you look quite radiant," said the infatuated Edmund.

" But mind," she immediately rejoined, in a low whisper and with an arch smile, " that you do not fall in love with

Angela Vivaldi again to-night, for you were desperately enamoured of her before you knew me. Indeed, you told me so."

"My dear Emily, it only required to know you in order to put the Signora Vivaldi altogether out of my head. Besides," added Saxondale, in a very low and mysterious whisper, "my friend Lord Harold Stauton — you know him?"

"Yes, I think I do," replied Miss Emily, appearing to reflect for a few moments, though, in good truth, it was very far from necessary, for she was full well acquainted with that nobleman, as of course he was with her. "Well, what about him?"

"Oh, he intends to pay his court to Angela."

"She is a prude, a veitable prude," observed Emily Archer, "but the stillest water is sometimes that which runs the deepest. And now tell me, my dear Edmund, have you thought of the little commission I gave you this morning, when you so kindly insisted upon doing something as a proof of your affection?"

"I have it here," he responded, significantly tapping his waistcoat pocket. "Ah! I dare say you thought I had gone and lost it all at cards to-night, but you see you are mistaken."

"Then I suppose you called upon old Musters, as I told you?" observed Emily.

"Yes, to be sure, or else how could I have obtained the money? As for getting such a sum in addition to my allowance from old Lord Petersfield or those scurvy fellows Marlow and Malton, it was out of the question, particularly as that blessed mother of mine has been making mischief between me and my guardians. Would you believe it, they want me to go abroad as unpaid attaché to an embassy, or else to go and bury myself down in that dreadful old castle in Lincolnshire."

"But you will not, though?" said Miss Archer, somewhat alarmed lest the young nobleman should be suddenly removed from beyond the sphere of her influence.

"Don't be afraid, my dear Emily," responded Saxondale, "I am not quite such a fool. Besides, since you have given me this introduction to the old money-lender, and he is so exceedingly complaisant, I shall feel myself perfectly inde-

pendent of my guardians and my mother. I got a couple of thousands from old Musters this morning, and here is the thousand," he added, again tapping his waistcoat pocket, " that you require. But shall I give it to you now? "

" No, you are coming home with me presently, I hope," answered Miss Emily, with her most bewitching smile. " I ordered supper to be in readiness, and champagne to be put in ice. Besides, I have got my new carriage."

" Ah, is it come home? " asked Saxondale. " The coach-builder promised me it should be at Evergreen Villa by noon to-day."

" And he kept his word, my dear Edmund."

" And the two cream-coloured horses, with their splendid new harness? "

" They also were sent down this morning. Oh, I am so glad to have got rid of that sober-looking brougham, which was all that Mr. Walter would allow me. And, by the bye," added Emily, " the coachman has got his new livery, so that the equipage altogether is quite charming. And now that I think of it, my dear Edmund, I have to thank you for the case of champagne which came down to the villa last night, and the new service of plate from the silversmith's in Bond Street."

We will not, however, prolong our details of this conversation. Enough has been already recorded to show that the shrewd and cunning ballet-dancer had succeeded in enmeshing the foolish young aristocratic pigeon in her toils, and that she intended to pluck him most unmercifully so long as this infatuation on his part should continue.

But turn we now to another part of that concert-room, and there, in the remotest corner, retiring bashfully from the gaze which the lounging gallants insolently flung upon her as they passed, was a young creature of about sixteen, and whose beauty was rather of the pensive and interesting character than of the striking or dazzling description. Indeed, at first sight, there was nothing particularly attractive about this young ballet-dancer. It was only when, at a second look, the observer noticed her more attentively, the impression gradually forced itself upon his mind that he beheld a very pretty and interesting creature. For hers was a beauty the sense of which stole imperceptibly upon one, a beauty half the charm of which lay in its own retiring

modesty. Yet nothing could be sweeter or purer than the look which beamed forth from those mild blue eyes, when she raised them, and before they were bashfully veiled again by their thick, dark fringes; nothing could be more softly melancholy or touchingly plaintive than the expression which grew upon that young girl's countenance when all her thoughts, being withdrawn from the gay and busy scene around her, were concentrated on some source of affliction that lay deep in her soul. Her figure was slight and delicate, but beautifully symmetrical, and in her very shrinking from the rude and insolent looks that were flung upon her by the privileged loungers as they passed her by there was an unstudied elegance and a natural grace which made her seem at those moments sweetly captivating in spite of herself.

This young girl was named Henrietta Leyden. She had been a ballet-dancer only during the present season, and her salary was a mere pittance, eight shillings a week. But wherefore did she thus stand apart from the rest? Why did she shrink from the libertine looks that were fixed upon her? Because that young girl was still virtuous, still uncontaminated, even in the atmosphere of contamination. Yet, Heaven knows she was not virtuous for want of temptation, but because she was superior to it. She had been well brought up, her family had seen better days, but misfortunes had suddenly entered their house, ravaging it like an army; for death had taken away her father at a moment when his affairs required the utmost attention to rescue them from ruin, and thus that ruin had come. As an only resource wherewith to earn bread for her mother and a little brother, poor Henrietta had been forced to turn her accomplishment in dancing to the best possible account, and thus was it that she became one of the juniors in the ballet-corps.

Those fashionable loungers who gazed upon her with libertine looks, but who did not stop to speak to her now, had nearly all on former occasions whispered words of temptation in her ear, and had been repulsed. They therefore regarded her as a silly little prude, not good-looking enough to be worth any particular trouble; for it is not the retiring and modest beauty which steals into the souls of such men. It is the dazzling brilliancy or bold effrontery of charms which thrust themselves forward to be admired and courted that exercise the greatest influence on the passions — for

we will not say the hearts — of fashionable rakes and aristocratic libertines.

But presently an old man, at least four or five years past sixty, — yet dressed in the very height of fashion, and made up with all the artifices of the toilet so as to give as youthful an appearance as possible to his lean and shrivelled form, — accosted Henrietta Leyden. He wore a wig as punctiliously curled as any that may be seen in a hairdresser's shop in the Burlington Arcade; the set of false teeth fixed in his mouth had cost five hundred guineas; his eyebrows were stained with a black dye; and he affected to walk with a jaunty and debonair gait, just as if all the fires of youth were still animating his frame and the vigour of health giving elasticity to his limbs. But this old man was one of the richest nobles of the day, and it would be difficult throughout the ranks of a profligate aristocracy to discover one more profligate than Lord Everton.

"How is it, pretty Miss Leyden," said the old nobleman, smiling as blandly and affably as he could through the agency of his false teeth, "that you are standing thus apart? Every young lady has her friend or admirer or gallant to converse with save yourself."

"My lord," replied Henrietta, "I do not seek such companionship as that to which your lordship has alluded," and the blood mantled upon the girl's cheeks so as even to be visible through the rouge that was upon them, for this was not the first time she had been subjected to the persecutions of Lord Everton.

"Come, my dear, you must not be so short and abrupt in your answers to me. I seek to be your friend. Why can't you hold up that pretty face of yours, and let me see you smile?"

"Smile!" ejaculated the girl, with an accent of bitterness. Then, as if vexed at having allowed herself to betray for even an instant the feeling that was dominant in her heart, she turned abruptly away.

"Stop one moment, Miss Leyden. I wish to speak to you," said the old lord. "It is serious, very serious indeed."

Henrietta, surprised at these words, did turn back, and now her deep blue eyes were fixed with a sort of curiosity upon Lord Everton's countenance.

"I wish I could see you happy," he said, affecting a deep

sympathy for the young creature. "Look around you, what gaiety is upon every countenance! Observe Emily Archer, for instance, — or Mademoiselle d'Alembert, as she chooses to call herself, — how she and young Saxondale are laughing together! I am told that she is now under his protection, and it is natural she should be happy."

Henrietta Leyden was again turning away in mingled disappointment and disgust at the words which Lord Everton thus addressed to her, when he desired her to stop once more, and she, timid and bashful as she was, and fearful of drawing attention to herself by creating "a scene," shrank back into the corner where she had previously been standing; but at the same time she murmured, in a supplicating voice, "My lord, I beseech you to leave me."

The old nobleman beheld not that look of earnest entreaty which, as she spoke, she raised to his countenance. He saw only the beautiful blue eyes of the young ballet-girl, and thence his glances wandered to the pearly teeth that were visible between the virginal freshness of the lips, and to the white shoulders and neck which the scant, gauzy drapery left bare.

"You know," he said, "that I am very rich, and I can be as liberal as I am wealthy. I told you that I had something very serious to impart, and it is so. The other night you thought, perhaps, I was speaking mere unmeaning phrases, and addressing you in idle flatteries, and therefore you turned away, just as you were turning away a minute ago. But I am serious in offering you a mansion, splendid equipages, gold beyond all counting. I will surround you with luxuries, you shall quit the stage, and become a lady, nay, more, I will even settle upon you an annuity, so that at my death you will continue well off. All this I will do for you, Henrietta Leyden, and I came hither this night for the purpose of making you these proposals."

The young girl actually shivered from head to foot as she felt herself gradually yielding to the influence of these temptations. Wealth was suddenly placed within her reach; the dismal word proverty need never ring in her ears again, nor the spectral shade of want rise in its ghastly leanness and lankness before her affrighted view. She thought of the wretched garret from which she had come forth a few hours back to the brilliant scene of the opera, and to which she

must return when her part was played amidst the blaze of light upon the stage, — that garret where she had left her revered and idolized mother stretched upon the bed of sickness, destitute of every comfort, wanting even many of the bare necessaries of life, and where also her poor little brother, whom she loved so fondly and who loved her so affectionately in return, was clothed in rags and had nought save dry bread to eat. Of all this she thought, and it was no wonder if the young girl suddenly found herself sorely tempted. Oh, if that old lord had appeared before her in the light of a generous benefactor, proffering her succour with even the minutest portion of that colossal wealth which he lavished upon profligacies and dissipations, but which she could turn to so many useful and noble purposes, if it were thus as a disinterested friend that he had addressed her, she could have fallen down at his feet, she could have worshipped him, she could have bathed his hand with her tears, or have pressed it, all shrivelled as it was, to her lips! Nay, more, forgetting his ugliness and utterly losing sight of the loathsomeness of his made-up appearance, she could have embraced him as a daughter might fling her arms around the neck of a kind old grandsire. But, alas, it was not in the light of a benefactor that the old nobleman — as old in iniquity as he was in years — stood before her; but it was as a tempter, and though ready and willing to lavish countless showers of gold upon her in return for her virtue, yet not a single piece of the glittering metal would be placed in her hand through pure friendship.

The young girl had shivered and shuddered as if she had felt herself standing on the edge of a dizzy precipice, over the brink of which the touch of a feather or the breath of the lightest zephyr would precipitate her, and for a few moments she felt herself falling.

But the feeling was only transient. The golden vision was suddenly put away from her view by the strong hand of her own immaculate virtue; and if for an instant she had thought of succumbing for the sake of her afflicted mother and her poor little brother, it was now the image of that parent and the recollection of that sweet boy which suddenly armed her with all the strength to resist the temptation.

"My lord," she replied, in a calm tone of decision, "you are privileged to obtrude yourself in this place, privileged

also to utter what language you choose to the poor ballet-girl, but she also has her privilege, — the only one she possesses, — which is, to reject your offers with scorn, as I do now."

And having thus spoken, Henrietta Leyden passed abruptly away, and gliding amidst the throng that filled the concert-room, she hastened to one of the dressing-chambers, where she remained alone with her own thoughts until the bell rang to summon her to that stage where her dance was to be feathery light though her heart was leaden heavy, and her countenance to be wreathed into smiles though inwardly her spirit was weeping the bitterest, bitterest tears.

Contrast for a moment the behaviour of Emily Archer and Henrietta Leyden. The former a star of the ballet, with a handsome salary that was in itself sufficient to provide her with luxuries as well as comforts, the latter an obscure novice in the corps, with a wretched pittance that did not allow her even the bare necessaries of life; the former plunging into dissipation and vice without an excuse, the latter avoiding temptation though with every excuse to succumb; the former selling her charms for superfluities, the latter preserving her virtue though in want of necessaries. Truly, Henrietta Leyden was an exception to the general rule. Yet, thank God! for the credit of humanity and the honour of the female sex, there are such exceptions; and it is the proudest moment of the author's power when he can illustrate them, as it ought to be the happiest one in the reader's recreation when he can contemplate them.

CHAPTER XXII

HENRIETTA LEYDEN

The ballet had commenced, and Angela Vivaldi, more brilliant and more beautiful if possible than ever, was received with enthusiastic plaudits. Hers was a style of dancing which combined so much exquisite refinement of modesty and such winning grace, that she appealed far less to the sense than to the sentiment of those who possessed souls capable of being moved by the dancer's more chastening effects. Never with her was it a study to adopt voluptuous attitudes, nor make meretricious displays of her charms. There was a purity of soul shining as it were through her, a halo of innocence and chastity surrounding her, a perfume of virginal freshness filling the atmosphere in which she moved. She danced not to please the libertine, but to chasten him; not to excite the passions, but to absorb them, as it were, in the more elevated feeling of a poetic refinement.

At first she danced alone; then she was joined by two other leading members of the ballet, and the three together, personifying the Graces, performed a measure which by its elegance and its tasteful simplicity enchanted all the spectators. The beauteous Angela, with her long dark hair playing in ringlets upon her ivory shoulders, held a garland of flowers in her right hand, while her two companions made a gauzy scarf float high above their heads. The three threw all the lyrical sweetness of poesy into their performance, so that while their airily bounding and flitting forms displayed every grace for which the dance affords such admirable scope, there was nothing in gesture, movement, attitude, or look to shock the most punctilious observer, if any such were present. But then Angela's companions caught as it were the chastening spirit which animated

herself, and never had they themselves performed with such magical effect.

But when the Signora Vivaldi retired from the stage, and was succeeded by the full corps of the ballet, how different was the dance which took place. Then meretricious looks were thrown around. Then voluptuous attitudes were studied, and then, too, was it nought save an appeal to the sensuousness instead of the sense of all the spectators. Unless, perhaps, in the case of Henrietta Leyden; but she, poor girl, played too obscure a part in the mazy and intricate routine of the ballet, either to attract any particular degree of attention to herself or to give effect to the chastity of her own style. Suddenly, in the midst of the dance, so quick and violent a paroxysm of intense feeling seized upon her — all the tenderest emotions surging up, as it were, to the very lips and to the eyes of the poor girl — that it seemed as if she must burst into tears, and catching the opportunity of being close by the wings she retreated from the stage. To the angry demand of the ballet-master, whom she at once encountered there, she replied in a broken voice that she had been taken with indisposition, and as she was but a mere accessory easy to be dispensed with, and whose absence would not be missed, he said no more. Nor did he trouble himself any further about the poor girl or her indisposition the next instant after she had disappeared from his view.

The tears had now gushed forth from her eyes, and she sped to the nearest dressing-room, anxious to escape from the notice of those amongst whom she hurriedly passed, — performers, carpenters, scene-shifters, and others. In the confusion of her feelings and in her haste to conceal them, she did not notice that she had opened the door of a chamber which was not her own, and rushing abruptly in, she perceived not her mistake until all in a moment she found herself in the presence of Angela Vivaldi. Then, casting through her tears a rapid glance around, the poor girl discovered that she had entered the wrong room.

Starting back, Henrietta began to stammer forth some words of apology, when Angela said, in the kindest voice and with the sweetest manner possible, " You have given no offence; it was a mistake on your part. But heavens! you are weeping. Surely it is not because you are afraid — "

" No, signora," Henrietta hastened to exclaim, " I am not afraid of having offended you, for you have spoken kindly to me," she added, in a lower voice and with a more deliberate tone, " and it is so seldom — so very seldom — that any one speaks kindly to me."

Angela Vivaldi's heart was melted by the poor girl's words and manner, and also by the melancholy look which, with her soft blue eyes, Henrietta bent upon the brilliant *danseuse;* and turning around to her lady's-maid, who was in attendance, Angela motioned her to shut the door, near the threshold of which Henrietta was still lingering.

" Now sit down," continued Signora Vivaldi, taking the girl's hand, and literally compelling her to occupy the chair to which she led her; for though they were both dancers, yet, as the reader has seen, the ballet has its aristocracy, and while poor Henrietta was in the lowest plebeian rank of the corps, Signora Vivaldi occupied the highest patrician eminence, and therefore the former felt as timid and bashful in the presence of the latter as a milliner's apprentice when waiting upon a duchess. " Now tell me why you were weeping," resumed Angela Vivaldi; " has something annoyed you? Even now your heart is full, and you are sobbing. Maria," she added, turning to her lady's-maid, " give her a glass of wine — she is unwell."

Maria, who was a good-natured, steady, respectable woman, midway between thirty and forty years of age, hastened to place a decanter of wine and some biscuits upon the table; then filling a glass, she handed it to Henrietta, saying, " Take this, my poor child, it will do you good."

Miss Leyden raised the glass to her lips, and was about to sip the wine, for she did indeed feel faint and ill, but at that same instant the idea flashed across her that if her poor mother had but the single glass of wine which she now held in her hand, it would cheer her — it would do her good. And as for that plate of cakes, how the poor girl would have liked to take some of them home to her little brother! Suddenly bursting forth into a fresh paroxysm of grief, she put the untasted glass down upon the table, and then, unable to prevent herself from giving full vent to the anguish which had now fairly broken down all the last remaining barriers which had hitherto kept it pent up, she covered her face with her two small thin hands and sobbed bitterly.

Angela Vivaldi did not immediately attempt to console the poor girl. She knew that this outpouring of affliction would disburden her heart of the severity of the woe that weighed upon it. But at length she said, in that soft and gentle voice which makes woman a ministering angel even unto one of her own sex, "Tell me what it is that afflicts you, and perhaps it will be in my power to alleviate your sorrow."

"Oh, signora!" exclaimed Henrietta Leyden, suddenly removing her hands from her countenance and gazing with her tearful eyes upon the eminently beautiful features on which she read an expression of the sincerest sympathy, "it is so hard to be compelled to dance when the soul is filled with anguish. Besides, it seems to be such a dreadful mockery to play one's part in a performance that is intended only for the gay and happy, when the heart is ready to break."

"And is such your case, poor girl?" asked Angela, upon whose long dark lashes the diamond tear-drops were now glittering.

"Alas, yes!" was the mournful reply. "It was in the middle of the ballet that I was seized with such a sudden sensation of indescribable woe, as the contrast was all in a moment forced upon my mind between the brilliant scene spreading out before me and the sorrowful one which I had left at home, and to which I am about to return."

"Now tell me your name, and everything that relates to you," said Angela, in the kindest and most soothing manner.

Henrietta answered the question by giving those few particulars concerning her mother and her brother which we have already lightly sketched forth; then she added, with a sudden outburst of impassioned feeling, "Ah! signora, it is not only cruel to suffer thus, but dreadful to think that through such sufferings the gold of the tempter often prevails. I have resisted hitherto, but Heaven alone knows —"

She stopped suddenly short, and cast down her eyes in shame at having even so far given an expression to the dread apprehension that there was a possibility of her ultimately succumbing.

"Miss Leyden," said the eminent *danseuse*, taking

Henrietta's hand, " you must allow me to be of some service to you. But no one need know anything about it, and if you do not wish to continue your present avocation — However," she observed, suddenly checking herself, as she felt that it would be imprudent to promise too much to one who was almost a total stranger to her, for Angela knew little or nothing of the generality of the ballet-dancers, " however, we will talk more upon that subject on a future occasion. Have the kindness to give me your address — there are writing materials on the table before you — and to-morrow you will receive a visit from some one who may perhaps be inclined to assist you."

With these words Angela Vivaldi rose from the seat which she had taken close to Henrietta, and advancing to a chest of drawers where her purse lay, she took out some money, wrapped it up in a little piece of paper, and then returning toward the table where Henrietta was writing down her address, she bent over her and said, whisperingly, " This will suffice, poor girl, for your immediate wants."

Miss Leyden, whose heart was now swelling almost to bursting, but with emotions very far different from those which she had so recently experienced, pressed to her lips the hand that had placed the little packet in her own; while she endeavoured to murmur forth some words expressive of her gratitude, but her utterance was choked, and beyond a few broken syllables she could say nothing.

" Hasten home to your mother, my young friend," said Angela, " and do not be afraid that I shall forget you."

Henrietta went forth from the presence of Signora Vivaldi with feelings which can be better understood than described. It was not so much because the eminent *danseuse* had put money into her hand, for she knew not yet how much the paper contained, but it was because such compassionate sympathy had been shown her, because she had been treated with kindness, and because at parting Angela had called her by the name of " friend." Oh, for the humble and obscure ballet-girl, with eight shillings a week, to be suddenly admitted to the friendship of the renowned *danseuse* whose path was paved with gold and strewed with flowers! Oh, to have won the sympathy of her whose high and brilliant position she had so often envied! It appeared

to be a dream, — a vision from which there would be the sad wakening of disappointment.

On hastening to the dressing-room which she and all the inferior members of the ballet had in common amongst themselves, Henrietta lost no time in putting off her gauzy raiment, washing the rouge from her cheeks, and resuming her own apparel. But, ah! how different now did the young girl look. Her countenance was pale, very pale, even to sickness, and yet she seemed far more sweetly interesting in her pallor than when the roseate tint of art was spread upon her cheeks to mock the pensiveness of her beauty. But her attire, how plain, how scant even to meanness, was it! Nevertheless her clothes were as scrupulously neat and clean as their dire poverty would permit them to be. The cotton dress was faded, the shawl was worn thread-bare, the ribbons of the cheap straw-bonnet showed that they had been long in use. Poor girl, what more could she do for herself upon eight shillings a week, with an invalid mother, and a little brother of seven years old, too young to earn aught on his own account.

Henrietta had concealed Angela's gift in her bosom, because several other ballet-girls were changing their apparel in the dressing-room at the same time, nor even when beyond the threshold of the opera-house and in the street, did she pause to ascertain to what extent Angela's generosity had gone. Her heart was so full of the new emotions which such unlooked-for and unusual sympathy had excited that she felt they were even too sacred to be disturbed by the selfish and worldly-minded proceeding of counting the contents of the paper; and so she sped on homeward, without enlightening herself upon that point, or even experiencing the wish to do so. It was a luxury, novel and ineffable, for the poor girl to think of the kindness whereof she had been the object, so that the circumstance of the money gift was for the moment of the least importance in her thoughts.

Let us now turn our attention for a few minutes to the interior of a room, or, rather, an attic, belonging to a house in one of the confined, dirty, and gloomy-looking courts leading out of Little Pulteney Street, Soho. Although two o'clock in the morning, yet a light burned in that attic, but it was only a miserable rush-candle, which just alleviated

the darkness and shadowed forth the poverty-stricken appearance of the room. The little window had originally possessed six panes of glass, of a very small size; two of these alone remained, and the vacant squares were covered with paper. A crazy bedstead with a flock bed, two chairs, a small table, a washing-stand, and a few cooking utensils comprised the whole of the furniture of the wretched attic. Yet everything was scrupulously clean.

In the bed lay a female of about forty, and whose pale and emaciated countenance, sunken eyes, and thin wasted arms denoted the invalid. Indeed, it appeared as if the hand of death were already upon her. She was awake, and, with her head supported on one arm, was contemplating the countenance of a pretty but delicate-looking little boy who lay fast asleep by her side. The child, who was about seven years old, had the most beautiful chestnut hair that ever was seen; curling naturally about his well-shaped little head, it was as soft and silken as that of a girl. The poor mother, as she bent over her sleeping darling, showed by the nervous compression of her lips that she could scarcely subdue an outburst of grief, and unconsciously on her part did two tears drop from her eyes upon the cheek of the child. It was not till she perceived them that she felt that she was weeping, and she kissed away from her boy's face the tears she had thus let fall.

" Poor child! " she thought to herself, " what is to become of thee? I shall not long remain to watch over you; I feel that death will soon come to claim me as his own. O Almighty God! have mercy upon this poor innocent child, who has done no harm, who is incapable of doing harm. Alas, alas! if it were not impious, I could wish, my darling little Charley, that you had never been born. Oh, how strange it is that according as we are rich or poor, do our children prove the objects of pleasure or of pain. Had I the means to make thee happy, poor child, how rejoiced should I be to possess thee; but now that I am steeped to the very lips in poverty, and that within the four narrow walls of this wretched chamber hunger is often our guest, I sorrow that thou, my poor child, wast ever born to so much misery. Your sister has to toil for us both, — for thee, helpless little one, and for me, her equally helpless mother. Oh, my God," exclaimed Mrs. Leyden, aloud, as a terrible

idea flashed across her mind, " extend thine all-protecting influence over my poor Henrietta! I shudder when I think of the temptations to which she is exposed, — temptations which her own exalted sense of virtue makes her recoil from, but to which, alas! a prolongation of so much misery may in a moment of despair drive her to succumb. Oh, how I tremble every time she goes forth to the fulfilment of her arduous duties. I think to myself, ' Thou leavest this abode of poverty pure and chaste, my Henrietta, but is it not to be dreaded that the day may come when you will return with the blush of shame upon your cheeks and not daring to meet the gaze of thy mother.' "

Overpowered by the thought, the unhappy woman threw herself back upon the bolster, for pillow there was none, and covering her face with her emaciated hands, she sobbed aloud. Little Charley, being disturbed by the sounds of his mother's grief, awoke and began to cry. Throwing his arms about her neck, he said, " Don't be unhappy, dear mamma," and in his own pretty childish way he did all he could to console her.

Now, the very endearments of that child, so far from pouring balm into the heart of the unhappy woman, were like so many daggers plunging down into it, for with irresistible force rushed a thousand harrowing reflections to her mind. Was it not shocking that a child of such a sweet and affectionate disposition should be doomed to the sad fate of poverty and misery and perhaps want? For though the mother and daughter had hitherto managed, even by dire self-privation, to give the poor little fellow enough bread to eat, yet how long might their ability to do so last? Suppose that Henrietta lost her engagement at the opera, what would become of them? And when the season was over, if she should fail to obtain another engagement, what then were they to do? Oh, all this was more than the poor woman could endure to think of, and yet the terrible questions were incessantly forcing themselves upon her. No wonder, then, that as she now took that dearly beloved child in her arms and strained him to her bosom, his very endearments and caresses should make her feel all the more acutely the anguish and agony of her position, and dread all the more poignantly for his own future destiny. The little fellow sobbed himself off to sleep again upon his

mother's breast, and then, as she once more contemplated his sweetly beautiful countenance, — all the more beautiful because replete with childhood's innocent expression, — and as she lovingly played with his silken chestnut hair, she again found herself giving way to her despondent musings.

"Poor child! passing the greater portion of your days in the sickly atmosphere of this wretched room, perhaps art thou imbibing the seeds of disease and death from that mother who gave thee life. Alas! is it indeed a mortal sickness which has fastened itself upon me? Must I die soon? Am I sinking and fading away? Or is it through want and privation and sorrow that I am thus stretched upon this sick-bed? My sweet boy, how cheerfully would I surrender up my life this moment if it would ensure thine happiness and prosperity! Thou, thy poor mother's darling, how rejoiced should I be if I had the means of giving thee toys to play with, and pretty clothes to wear, and an airy, wholesome room to sleep in, and good food to eat. But thy cheeks are pale, my poor little fellow, for want of proper nourishment and fresh air. Oh, if we had but a cottage in the country, were it ever so humble, that you might frolic about in the green fields and that the colour should come back to your cheeks — But, no, no, this may not be, this never will be! Poverty has laid its hand upon us, penury is our doom, wretchedness our fate. May God grant, my poor boy, that all these evils blight not the purity of your sweet sister. Oh, let us suffer all that we do suffer with resignation, — ay, even with cheerfulness, — so long as my own Henrietta remains the good and virtuous girl that she is at present. But when I think of the temptations to which she is exposed, the heartless libertines who frequent that place, and the sufferings which she sees her mother and her brother experience, I tremble — oh, how I tremble — lest when in her despair she stretches out her hand to God, the infamy of man may drop gold into that appealing palm!"

At this moment Mrs. Leyden's ear caught the sound of a light step ascending the stairs, — ascending, too, more lightly and with a greater elasticity than ever, light and elastic though that step always was; and it was also with a greater precipitation than usual that Henrietta threw open the door and made her appearance. Her cheeks, that were

wont to be so pale, were glowing with excitement, her eyes, habitually so mild and soft in their pensive expression, had dancing light in their looks, and her sweet lips were wreathed into a sunny smile. The poor mother instantaneously caught some faint reflection of that joyousness which invested her daughter, for it struck her that the poor girl had received a little increase of salary, perhaps a shilling or two; and such a circumstance would indeed be fraught with hope and bliss for a family that had to count and weigh well the pence that it daily disbursed.

"Oh, my dear mother," exclaimed Henrietta, flinging her arms about Mrs. Leyden's neck, "such good news! I have found so kind a friend."

"A friend, my child?" echoed Mrs. Leyden, with a sudden paroxysm of affright, for what friend was a pretty young girl of sixteen, belonging to the ballet, and therefore regarded as a legitimate object for every libertine overture, — what sort of a friend was such a girl likely to find?

"Yes, dear mother, a good and generous friend, who took compassion upon me," continued Henrietta, with rapid and excited utterance; and she perceived not the sudden alarm which had struck with so sickening a sensation to the heart of her mother. "I have money about me — I know not yet how much it is, but let us see."

"Money, child?" murmured Mrs. Leyden, sinking back upon the bolster.

"Yes, look, dear mother!" cried the exultant Henrietta, as she took the little packet from her bosom and opened it. "Heavens! gold! five sovereigns! Oh!" and the poor girl, overcome by her feelings at finding pounds where she had perhaps only thought of shillings, burst into tears.

"Henrietta," almost shrieked forth her mother, now springing frantically up on the wretched couch, "answer me as you would reply to your God! That gold — "

"Good heavens, mother," cried the damsel, now all in an instant comprehending what was passing in Mrs. Leyden's mind, "do you think so ill of your daughter? No, no, thank God, it is not so!"

And with a cold shudder at the bare idea — likewise with a cruel revulsion of feeling produced by her parent's dishonouring suspicion — she sank down on her knees at the side of the bed, and wept bitterly. Little Charley, awakened

by these rapid ejaculations on the part of his mother and sister, sat up and began to cry.

"Henrietta, my dearest child," exclaimed the unhappy woman, "if I have wronged you, forgive me — oh, forgive me!"

"Alas, alas!" cried Henrietta, hysterically, "I am virtuous and pure and innocent, and yet for all this I obtained not credit even with my own mother!"

"Dearest child, this reproach tortures me almost to madness," and Mrs. Leyden wrung her hands bitterly.

"Miserable gold!" exclaimed Henrietta, springing up from her knees with a look of despair. "The want of it produces misery, and the possession of it brings a darker misery still. Mother, you have wronged me, and this from you — O God! I should never have expected it."

"Sister, dear sister," said poor little Charley, frightened at what was passing, "do not speak so to dear mamma!"

"Oh, my beloved brother," exclaimed Henrietta, straining the little fellow to her bosom, "but a few minutes back I was dreaming, fondly dreaming, of brighter days for you, but now all is dark, — darker than ever. Perish that gold since it has made my very mother suspect me," and suddenly relinquishing the fervid clasp in which she had held her brother, Henrietta snatched up the five sovereigns which she had thrown upon the bed, and was about to dash her hand through the window to fling them forth, when a hollow groan from her mother's lips suddenly made her pause. "Heavens! what have I done? Dear mother, you are fainting."

"No, I shall be better in a few moments. Give me some water, my dear child."

The gold dropped from Henrietta's hand, as she flew to fill a cup with water and place it to her mother's lips. Then she sprinkled a few drops upon that pale and emaciated countenance, while little Charley sat up in the bed, gazing in blank consternation upon what was passing, for the child could not possibly understand the nature of this scene, but the terror of which hushed his crying and made him speechless.

"Dear Henrietta," said Mrs. Leyden, now somewhat recovering, "I have wronged you — I see that I have most fearfully wronged you, and till the last day of my life shall

I regret it. But, oh, it is misery which warps our hearts, misery that fills us with suspicion, misery that changes our very natures, misery that blights all the freshest feelings of confidence — "

" My dear mother, let us say no more upon the subject," interrupted Henrietta, but yet in a voice which showed how deeply shocked her soul had been and how cruel was the wound that her mother's suspicion had inflicted on her heart. " The friend whom Heaven has sent us is Angela Vivaldi, the kindest, the best, the most generous of beings."

" Henrietta, can you forgive me, can you pardon your poor mother? Oh, that I could recall the incidents of the last few minutes! "

" Forgive you, dear mother? Do not speak to me thus," and the gentle girl again flung her arms about her parent's neck.

Then little Charley began crying once more, but now it was rather in joy than otherwise, when he beheld his sister and mother embracing.

Henrietta proceeded to inform Mrs. Leyden of everything which had occurred to her that night at the opera, and with which the reader is already acquainted. Frankly did she explain the overtures made to her by Lord Everton, the feelings which had seized upon her when in the middle of the dance, and then the scene that had ensued in Signora Vivaldi's dressing-chamber. Mrs. Leyden embraced her daughter again and again, and again and again too did she implore that good girl's forgiveness on account of having even for an instant mistrusted her purity.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VISITOR

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon that Henrietta ascended the stairs leading to the attic, having been out to make some purchases. Her step was light, and there was gladness in her heart, but there would have been more elasticity in the former and a purer bliss in the latter, if that distressing scene had not taken place a few hours back with her mother. For though the poor girl had freely and frankly forgiven her parent, — and though she resolved to appear to think no more of that occurrence, — yet was the wound still bleeding in her heart; for she could not help saying to herself, " My mother suspected me, and therefore she has no confidence in my virtue."

Yet, when she entered the attic and began to display her purchases upon the table, the disagreeable impression left upon her mind by the incident just referred to temporarily vanished; because she experienced so true and heartfelt a pleasure at beholding the joy which beamed in the eyes of her pretty little brother. From her basket Henrietta took out a variety of provisions and other articles, including many little comforts for her invalid mother, and then she produced a complete new suit of clothes for Charley. Mrs. Leyden, half-sitting up in the bed, watched her daughter's proceedings, and when the basket was emptied, she said, " Henrietta, you have bought nothing for yourself."

" Oh, I require nothing at present," exclaimed the young girl. " Now, Charley, let me put you on your new things."

Then, with what heartfelt pleasure did Henrietta disapparel her brother of his old garments, and substitute the tasteful though modest suit she had brought him in. And he, poor boy, exhibited all that childish delight which is so

joyous to contemplate on the part of the young. Then, having finished dressing him, Henrietta took a comb and arranged his beautiful chestnut hair in a way to set off his sweet but delicate countenance to the utmost advantage.

Scarcely had all this been done, and while Henrietta and Mrs. Leyden were still admiring little Charley's appearance in his new clothes, footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and a man's voice saying, "There, my good woman, you need not come any farther; I shall find my way. The door at the top, you say, the one facing the stairs? There, you need not follow me, I tell you. Oh, I suppose you want something for your trouble? Stop, here's a shilling, and now pray let me find my way alone. Indeed, I must insist upon it."

These words were addressed to the landlady of the house, an officious, obtrusive, inquisitive kind of person, who, seeing that the visitor was evidently a man of substance, had endeavoured to push her way along with him in order to ascertain what he could possibly want with the Leydens. But he had got rid of her as much by his peremptory manner as by the donation of the shilling, and almost immediately afterward Mrs. Leyden and her children heard his footsteps halt at their door, at which he immediately knocked.

Henrietta opened it, and found herself in the presence of an old gentleman with a brown scratch-wig, a red face, a large double chin, and a short stout figure.

"Your name is Henrietta Leyden, I suppose?" said the gentleman. Then, catching sight of the invalid woman in bed, he observed, in a blunt offhand manner, "Don't mind me; I come with no hostile intent, it may be otherwise," and he unceremoniously walked into the room.

Henrietta shut the door, and at once placed a seat for the visitor's accommodation, for it struck her that this was an emissary from the kind-hearted Angela Vivaldi. Mrs. Leyden, who, the moment the knock sounded at the door, had settled herself in bed so as to be prepared for the presence of any visitor, entertained the same idea, and little Charley stood gazing upon the gentleman with childish wonder as to what he wanted.

"You expected a call from some one this morning?" said that individual, addressing himself to Henrietta. "I know all that took place last night between you and Signora

Vivaldi, with whom I have the honour to be acquainted, and she told me of your position, also of what she had given you. I suppose a part of the money has gone to dress this little fellow out in these new clothes? Well, he's a pretty little boy. What's your name, sir? "

"Charley Leyden, please sir," responded the child.

"And I suppose you are very fond of your sister? " asked the gentleman.

"Oh, yes sir. She is so good and kind to me, and she gave me these new clothes just now."

"And parted your hair for you, and made you look smart, eh, my boy? "

For a moment Charley was at a loss to understand whether the gentleman spoke in a scolding manner or not, and he looked up with a somewhat frightened glance toward his sister.

"Oh, I am not angry," exclaimed the visitor, drawing the boy toward him and smoothing down his hair; "you are a nice little fellow, but you ought to have more colour upon those cheeks. Well, we shall see. Madam," he continued, turning toward Mrs. Leyden, "you are an invalid. Pray, have you been ill long? "

"I have been suffering much for several months past," replied Mrs. Leyden, "and if it were not for that dear, sweet girl, I know not what would have become of me and her little brother," she added, the tears trickling down her cheeks.

"How much do you earn a week? " asked the gentleman, somewhat abruptly fixing her eyes on Henrietta.

"Eight shillings, sir," was the reply.

"Well, you had five pounds given you by Signora Vivaldi last night. Let us see what you have done with it."

"First of all, sir," returned Henrietta, "I paid three weeks' rent, which we had unfortunately fallen in arrear — "

"How much was that? "

"Seven shillings and sixpence, sir. We pay half a crown a week for this room — "

"It would be dear at a gift," ejaculated the visitor, whose principal characteristic seemed to be a strange and almost uncouth sort of bluntness. "Well, go on, what did you do next? "

"I paid the chemist, sir, who had been kind enough to

give us credit for some little medicines that my mother required. Then I bought some tea and sugar, some sago, and a few other little things that I thought would do my mother good. I also redeemed some linen from the pawnbroker's," added Henrietta, in a trembling voice and with blushing cheeks.

"Linen? I suppose for your own wear?"

"No, sir, to make my mother more comfortable," answered Henrietta, with a look that showed she was somewhat hurt by the question.

"Well, and then you bought these fine clothes for the little fellow here, eh?"

"Yes, sir; he was almost in rags. The suit he has now on cost fifteen shillings. I know it was a great deal to give in our condition, but, poor child, I could not bear to see him as he was," and the tears rolled down Henrietta's pale cheeks.

"Now you have told me all you bought for your mother and the boy, what did you buy for yourself? Come," exclaimed the gentleman, somewhat peremptorily, "show me the new dress or new shawl, whatever it was."

"I can assure you, sir," cried Mrs. Leyden, perceiving that her daughter was distressed by the question, "that this dear girl expended not a single sixpence upon herself; no, not even to the redemption of her Sunday clothing from the pawnbroker's."

"Oh!" muttered the visitor. "Have you many things in pledge?"

"Everything," replied Mrs. Leyden, bursting into tears.

"I don't know much about those sort of things," said the gentleman, "but I believe that the pawnbroker gives you duplicates, does he not? Come, let me see them all."

Mrs. Leyden made an affirmative sign to Henrietta, who forthwith produced from a drawer a considerable quantity of pawnbrokers' tickets, which with trembling hands and blushing cheeks she laid upon the table.

"You have not always been poor," said the gentleman, as he examined the duplicates one after another. "Here is one for a ring, another for a watch, another for a pair of earrings; then we have gowns, blankets, sheets — God bless me! what a miscellaneous assortment of things, even down to petticoats and stockings!"

Although both Mrs. Leyden and Henrietta felt in their hearts that the old gentleman did not mean to be cruel, but that on the contrary he probably meant to give them some relief, yet they could not help feeling a little shocked at the apparently blunt and unfeeling manner, amounting almost to coarseness and indelicacy, with which he spoke of the articles that were pledged, and which might have shown him how bitter had been the need that had reduced them to such straits. But he did not seem to take any notice of the emotions his words and manner thus excited; and having scrutinized the duplicates, he gathered them all up in a methodical way, wrapped them in paper, and thrust them into his capacious breeches pocket.

" I shall take care of these and look over them again at my leisure," he said. Then fixing his eyes upon Henrietta, he asked, " Do you like the stage, and do you want to keep on it? "

She burst into tears, as if the very question were an insult to her pure and delicate feelings.

" I could worship the generous benefactor," cried Mrs. Leyden, " who would enable that dear girl to quit a profession which she abhors, and to which nothing but a dire necessity could have induced her to have recourse. When we were first reduced to distress, she endeavoured to support us by needlework, but it was so precarious and so badly paid — "

" Of course it is! " ejaculated the visitor. " Don't you know that in this Christian country, which gave twenty millions to emancipate the black slaves in the West Indies, there are swarms and swarms of white slaves for whom this same Christian country would not voluntarily give twenty million pence? But no matter; let us talk of your own affairs. Do you think, ma'am, that you could bear removal from this wretched den to a little better lodging, if such were provided for you? "

Mrs. Leyden in a few words — but these were uttered in a tone of deepest feeling — gave the gentleman to understand that she thought and hoped her indisposition had been produced, and indeed was now continued, more by want of proper nourishment and by grief and anxiety than by anything more serious; and while she was speaking Henrietta gazed with mingled hope and suspense upon the

visitor's countenance, in order to glean from its expression whether she dared anticipate that such a change could be effected on her mother's behalf as the one he had alluded to.

" Well," he said, with looks that were inscrutable, " we must see what is to be done. I think that you are a very good girl, Miss Henrietta, for the moment you got money, you did not go and dress yourself out in finery, as most young persons of your age would have done, and besides, you thought of your mother and brother first. I am very well pleased at that. As for the fifteen shillings you spent in embellishing this little fellow here, I can't find it in my heart to blame you for the outlay, although it was rather extravagant. He is a sweet boy, and it's natural to wish to see him look well. I do not mean to say any more at present, but it's very likely you will hear from me again."

When the eccentric visitor had taken his leave, little Charley caught hold of his sister's hand, saying, " I don't like that old gentleman, he seems so cross and ill-tempered, and he made you cry once."

" Yes, my dear Charley, but you must like him, though," returned Henrietta, " for he is no doubt a very good man. Oh, my dear mother," exclaimed the young girl, turning toward her parent, " is there not now some beam of hope for us? "

" I think so. Pray God that it is so! " answered Mrs. Leyden.

Henrietta now hastened to prepare some good and nutritious food for her invalid mother, but while she was so doing she experienced a gradual return of that feeling of sadness which had arisen from the distressing scene of the previous night. The thought that she had been suspected by her mother rankled in the poor girl's heart, — not with any sentiment of bitterness against that parent, whom she forgave from the bottom of her soul, but with a deep sorrow to think that her own conduct had not been sufficient in all its purity to guarantee her against such an injurious suspicion.

Mrs. Leyden, who watched her attentively during her present occupation, observed the natural pensiveness of her countenance gradually deepening into mournfulness, and she divined the cause. But she thought that the best

plan, under present circumstances, was to say nothing more upon the subject. Not that she was above repeating her prayer for forgiveness at her daughter's hand, but because she fancied that the less that was said upon the matter the sooner the impression of it would wear away from the young girl's mind. Besides, if any portion of the promises at which their late visitor had hinted should receive fulfilment, Mrs. Leyden cheered herself with the hope that in the joyous excitement produced by a change of circumstances Henrietta would very speedily forget the little incident which was now occupying her thoughts. Nor did Mrs. Leyden fail to perceive something that might even be termed satisfactory in the way that Henrietta had taken the thing to heart, for did it not prove that the young maiden was delicately sensitive in respect to her virtue, and that the least breath of suspicion tarnishing the fair mirror of her reputation was esteemed by her as a misfortune not to be borne?

A more comfortable meal than for many a long day had been partaken of by this family was presently served up by Henrietta's own hands; and when she saw how her little brother enjoyed himself, and how her mother's spirits were rallying under the genial influences of hope, the poor girl's countenance again brightened up, and she appeared to forget the occurrence which had been troubling her.

Scarcely was the meal over when heavy footsteps were heard ascending the stairs; then there was a loud knock at the chamber door, and on little Charley, who was now all life and spirits, rushing forward to answer the summons, a man in the garb of a hotel porter made his appearance laden with packages. The instant Henrietta's eyes embraced those packages at a glance, she recognized the numerous parcels which from time to time, and with almost a breaking heart, she had borne to the pawnbroker's; and if on those occasions she had wept bitter tears of hopelessness and despair, she now burst into tears again, but with joy and gratitude and gladness.

"A gentleman has sent me up with all these things," observed the porter, who was a good-tempered fellow himself and had not failed to comprehend that he had been made, though humbly and partially, the instrument of a good action. "Well, miss, you had better cry for joy than for sorrow," he went on to say. "But the old gentleman

desired me to tell you that you are all to be ready this evening between five and six o'clock, as he shall come and fetch you to go to some nicer lodgings."

Henrietta with a heart almost too full to allow her to speak endeavoured to induce the porter to take some money, but he declared that he had already been adequately paid, and having deposited the packets upon the table, he took his departure.

"Oh, what a change for us!" murmured Mrs. Leyden, the faintness of an overpowering joy coming over her.

Henrietta hastened to throw her arms around her mother's neck, saying, "Do you think you will be able to get up? Oh, I hope so, for now that you have got all your nice clothes again, and can go forth respectable as you were wont to do —"

"Believe me, my dear child," responded Mrs. Leyden, straining her daughter to her bosom, and then lavishing her caresses upon little Charley, who had advanced up to the side of the couch, "I am ten thousand times more gratified for your sake that all this has happened than for my own. Yes, my dear girl, I feel myself years younger, alike in health and spirits. Oh, it is necessary to drink deeply of the bitter waters of adversity in order to appreciate the sweetness of the returning founts of prosperity."

By the time another hour had elapsed, a great change had taken place in the appearance of the mother and daughter. Mrs. Leyden, having risen from her wretched pallet, had apparelled herself in a simple but genteel manner, while Henrietta had exchanged a faded and scanty garb for one which, without the slightest taint of finery, was alike elegant and tasteful. If in her discarded apparel she had seemed sweetly interesting, she now appeared exquisitely beautiful. Upon her cheeks, previously so very pale, there was now a delicate tint of the rose, but which even in its faintness and its delicacy was lovelier far than the bloom which art was wont to shed upon her countenance when she danced at the opera. The expression of her features was now bashfully charming rather than touchingly plaintive, and there was a mild lustre in the beautiful blue eyes which were half-veiled beneath their thick, dark fringes. The symmetry of her figure was admirably set off by the genteel and ladylike garb that she had put on, and altogether

Henrietta's appearance was so improved by the advantage of dress that Mrs. Leyden, with all a fond mother's pride, surveyed her with admiring looks.

"How pretty you seem now, sister," said little Charley, joy beaming in his eyes. "I am so glad you have got all these nice clothes, and mamma, too."

In short, the happiness of this little family seemed nearly complete; and Henrietta thought no more, at least for the present, of that incident which had at first so much afflicted her. It was now past three o'clock, as Mrs. Leyden perceived by her watch, which was among the things so generously redeemed for her from the pawnbroker's, and which she had already wound up.

"I promised to attend the ballet-master to-day at this hour," said Henrietta, suddenly recollecting her engagement. "What shall I do?"

"If our kind friend does not intend you to continue upon the stage," answered Mrs. Leyden, "you need take no further notice of that engagement."

"But ought I not," asked Henrietta, "to pen a note expressive of gratitude to the generous-hearted Signora Vivaldi? Oh, I will lose no more time in doing this."

"But you know not where the signora lives," observed Mrs. Leyden.

"True," exclaimed the young girl, with a sudden look of disappointment. "Oh, it would be so sweet, and such a relief to my heart's feelings to be able to pour forth all my joy and gratitude to that excellent being who evidently has made our case known to this benevolent gentleman."

"He will take charge of your letter, my dear girl," said the mother.

"Oh, but a thing that is done at once always has a truer air of sincerity," exclaimed Henrietta, now fully bent, in the enthusiasm of her feelings, upon carrying out her little project. "I will write my note and take it down to the opera, so that the signora may have it with the least possible delay. And at the same time I will make my excuses to the ballet-master, so that if by any accident I should have to return to my recent avocations, I may not make an enemy of him."

A shade gradually fell upon Mrs. Leyden's countenance as Henrietta thus notified her intention of revisiting that

establishment which the poor mother held in such horror, and to which dire necessity alone had from the very first constrained her to send her child. Henrietta this time observed not that gathering gloom on her mother's features; but, enthusiastic in her resolve to testify her fervid gratitude to Signora Vivaldi, she sat down at the table and penned a letter, the contents of which flowed with as genuine a sincerity from her heart as the tears which she had ere now shed welled forth from the same holy fount of feeling. This pleasing task being accomplished, she put on a simple but pretty bonnet and a neat shawl, selected from the things ere now reclaimed from the pawnbroker's, and having kissed her mother and brother, was about to trip with light step away upon her mission of gratitude.

"Would you not like to take little Charley with you?" asked Mrs. Leyden, concealing beneath a smile the sort of gloomy presentiment which had arisen in her mind at this resolve of her daughter to pay a last visit to the opera.

"Yes, to be sure," exclaimed the now happy girl; but then the next moment, as a sudden thought struck her, she said, "No, I cannot. I am going to speak to the ballet-master, and must not take any one behind the scenes with me. Now, my sweet Charley, do not look disappointed, because I shall be back soon, and then, you know, we are all going away together to some nicer place."

Having thus affectionately spoken to her brother, and having again kissed him, Henrietta sallied forth. The landlady of the house, with characteristic inquisitiveness, endeavoured to engage her in a gossip as she was passing out of the front door, for the woman was very anxious to know who the old gentleman was that with a sort of enchanter's wand had appeared to bring so much sudden happiness into the previously wretched chamber inhabited by the Leyden family. But Henrietta would not pause to gratify the landlady's curiosity, and turning out of the dark, gloomy court, she gained the street.

Upon being left alone with Charley, Mrs. Leyden relapsed suddenly into a mournful mood. Was it that the sudden presence of so much happiness, by unnaturally exciting her spirits, had led to a proportionate reaction, and that her mind, enfeebled by illness, was unable long to endure a joy so great that it engendered a mistrustfulness of itself?

No doubt this was the explanation of Mrs. Leyden's feelings, and in such a morbid mood it was also natural that she should entertain misgivings in respect to her daughter's sudden and impulsive revisit to the opera. Dire misfortune had so warped the poor woman's feelings as to render her somewhat suspicious of every circumstance that might occur, and made her invest the commonest incidents with an air of ominous importance. She accordingly began to fear that Henrietta, having no sooner regained the possession of good clothing, was anxious to display her change of circumstances to her acquaintances at the opera. The reader will no doubt consider it wrong of Mrs. Leyden to judge her daughter thus, wrong to form such an opinion of the young girl whose self-denial had been exhibited in so many various ways during their period of poverty, especially on that very morning, when she had purchased comforts for her brother and her mother, but not even necessaries for herself. Mrs. Leyden felt, too, that she was wrong to give way to these fears and suspicions, but she could not help it, she was not mistress of her thoughts, and they gained upon her. She was naturally a good woman, but the best natures are liable to feelings and weaknesses of this kind, especially when the physical energies have been impaired by sickness, suffering, and calamity.

An hour passed, and Mrs. Leyden said to herself, "Henrietta ought to return now." Half an hour more elapsed, and still she did not come back. Then Mrs. Leyden kept looking at the watch which had that day been restored to her, and this very watch, though affording a proof of returning prosperity, became in another sense a source of pain and anxiety, as it indicated the lapse of time during which Henrietta returned not. The incident of the watch affords an illustration of all the circumstances of this world, none of whose pleasures are without pain and none of whose roses are without thorns.

Half-past five o'clock! Henrietta had been absent two hours, and Mrs. Leyden's excitement grew intolerable. She felt very ill again, yet was too nervous to lie down. Little Charley, too young to perceive that his mother was suffering, and too innocent to understand how she could suffer now that she had good clothes and plenty of food again, and was going away to a nicer place, as he had been assured, was

amusing himself with the pictures in one of the books which were among the things redeemed from the pawnbroker's.

Presently footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and the elderly gentleman of the morning made his appearance.

"Well, ma'am, I am glad to see you are up," he immediately observed. "Ah, my little fellow, looking at a picture-book, eh? But where is your sister?"

"Henrietta has gone to the opera, sir, to leave a note of thanks for Signora Vivaldi," said Mrs. Leyden, answering the question.

"That's all very well and good," interrupted the old gentleman, "but she might have given it to me."

"That is what I suggested," rejoined Mrs. Leyden, "but she would take it herself."

"Then I suppose we must wait for her," said the visitor, depositing himself in a chair. "How long has she been gone?"

"Two hours, sir," returned Mrs. Leyden, endeavouring to banish the expression of uneasiness from her countenance.

"Two hours!" ejaculated the gentleman. "That's rather long. It is now more than half-past five," he continued, looking at his watch. "Did not the porter tell you I should be here between five and six?"

"He did. And now let me thank you again and again —"

"Nonsense! I don't want thanks. I suppose your daughter will not be long. Come, my little fellow, you and I will look at these books together till your sister comes back."

Another half-hour passed. Mrs. Leyden was suffering excruciations, which she endeavoured to conceal as well as she was able. and the old gentleman began to grow impatient. Another half-hour, then another, till at length it was seven o'clock. Mrs. Leyden, who had frequently turned aside upon her chair to conceal her tears, now burst into a flood of weeping, and becoming dreadfully excited, declared her conviction that something was wrong. The old gentleman said what he could to soothe her, and volunteered to hasten off to the opera and see if anything was really the matter. He accordingly sped away, and during his absence Mrs. Leyden became so ill that she was compelled to lie down. Little Charley now saw that something fresh had occurred to make his mother unhappy, and she

was not able to reassure him. In a little more than half an hour the old gentleman came back. He wore a gloomy look, and Mrs. Leyden at once saw that he had no satisfactory tidings for her.

"Your daughter, ma'am," he said, "has been to the opera. She was there a little after four o'clock, but only stayed a few minutes while she delivered her letter and spoke to the ballet-master. She then took her departure, but was joined at the stage door by some gentleman whose name I could not learn, and with whom she went away."

At this intelligence Mrs. Leyden gave a low moan, and fainted. The old gentleman threw water upon her face, while Charley hastened down to summon the landlady. The unhappy mother regained her senses, but showed every symptom of being very dangerously ill. A doctor was sent for, and he declared that it would be impossible to remove her for the present. The idea of transferring the poor lady to another lodging was consequently abandoned for that evening.

The old gentleman remained at the lodging till past nine o'clock, in the hope that Henrietta would return. But the young girl came not, and Mrs. Leyden upbraided herself bitterly at the cause of what she believed to be her daughter's flight.

"I suspected her virtue, I accused her wrongfully," she exclaimed, with wild accents and passionate gestures, "and the dagger which I planted in her heart has rankled there. O heavens! is it possible that she has gone? Has she left the mother who dared suspect her innocence? Has she said to herself that it were useless to take a pride henceforth in that virtue for which she obtained not credit? Has she, in short, abandoned herself to guilt in a paroxysm of despair?"

The old gentleman sought an explanation of these self-accusings on the part of Mrs. Leyden, and when the unhappy mother told him what had taken place when her daughter brought home the gold she had received from Angela Vivaldi, and how the incident had since dwelt in Henrietta's mind, the old gentleman at first became very thoughtful. But at length he said, "You must tranquillize yourself, Mrs. Leyden, for I do not think, from what I have seen and heard of your daughter, she would suffer her galled feelings thus to urge

her on to so desperate a step as accepting libertine proposals. In any case, you will not lose a friend in me. I shall come and see you again to-morrow; but as I feel interested in all that concerns you, mind you send and let me know the instant your daughter comes back. For that she will come back, with a satisfactory account of her present absence, I feel confident. Here is my address."

Thus speaking, the old gentleman laid his card upon the table, and having kissed little Charley, who had gone to bed an hour previously, crying bitterly at his sister's absence, the eccentric benefactor took his departure. He did not, however, leave the house without placing gold in the landlady's hands, and desiring her to minister in all possible ways to the comfort and well-being of Mrs. Leyden. But, alas! unhappiness had once again entered that humble chamber, not the unhappiness produced by poverty, for this evil existed there no longer, but the unhappiness arising from the disappearance of Henrietta and the self-accusings of her invalid mother.

It appeared from the card which the old gentleman had left upon the table that the name of the poor family's benefactor was Mr. Jonathan Gunthorpe, and that his address was at the Bell and Crown, Holborn.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRECEPTOR AND HIS PUPIL

The name of William Deveril has been occasionally mentioned in our pages, and we must now introduce him more particularly to the reader. He was quite a young man, but it was not very easy to fix his exact age to a year or two, because his complexion being rendered somewhat dark by a long residence in a southern clime, together with a certain thoughtfulness of look, possibly made him appear a trifle older than he really was. Thus he might have been a little under twenty or a little above twenty, for with no nicer precision could his age be fixed.

He had dark hair, worn somewhat long, and curling naturally, whiskers which though small increased the manliness of his otherwise youthful appearance, and fine black eyes, beaming with intelligence when not bent down in the mind's abstraction of thought. He was tall and slender, not merely symmetrically formed, but modelled with an Apollo-like grace and elegance. His features were of the Grecian cast, his upper lip short, with that aristocratic curl which may express disdain where there is false pride, but which is equally indicative of a calm and manly dignity where there is no overweening hauteur. His teeth were remarkable for their whiteness and evenness, and there was something peculiarly sweet, though by no means effeminate, in his smile. It denoted a kind disposition and a generous heart, which indications of character were amply corroborated by the high and noble forehead that seemed formed to be crowned with nature's own peerless diadem of intelligence.

William Deveril was accustomed to dress in a style which became a perfect gentleman, but without the least preten-

sion to finery, much less of mawkish dandyism. Nevertheless, a stranger who beheld that elegant young man, of such exquisite masculine beauty, apparelled in the most becoming style, would have been very far from suspecting that he was anything less than a scion of the aristocracy. And yet, as the reader is already aware, William Deveril earned his bread by giving lessons in drawing, music, and painting upon ivory. But then, he had become quite the rage, so to speak, as a professor of these arts, and teaching only in the best families, he was enabled to turn his talents to a very lucrative advantage.

It was about midday as Mr. Deveril knocked at the door of Lady Macdonald's mansion in Cavendish Square, and to his questions as to whether Lady Florina Staunton was at home, the footman who answered his summons replied in the affirmative. The young professor was thereupon conducted to a parlour, where he found Lady Florina seated alone.

The young patrician damsel had already arranged upon a table the requisite drawing materials, and it had been with a fluttering heart that she had counted the minutes until William Deveril made his appearance. Now, as he entered the room, she with that command which a well-bred and modest young female is enabled to exercise over her feelings, received him with that affable courtesy which she was always wont to display toward her young preceptor. Then resuming her seat from which she had risen, she said, "I have done but little, Mr. Deveril, to this picture since you were last here, but I hope to make some progress this morning."

As she thus spoke she bent her head over a piece of ivory, of an oval shape, and about six inches in diameter at its widest part. The subject of the design was a beautiful landscape which the fair pupil was copying from a water-colour drawing made by Deveril himself, and so far as her performance had advanced, it gave promise of being a very tolerable imitation of the original.

"Your ladyship has not touched it, I see, since I was here the day before yesterday," observed Deveril, as he glanced at the ivory. Then taking a seat near his beautiful pupil, he added, "But if your ladyship can give me an hour to-day, some progress will indeed be made."

"I wish to have it finished, Mr. Deveril," answered Florina, "because my aunt is desirous to present it to some one of her acquaintance. I had therefore purposed to beg you to extend the lesson to at least two hours, — that is, if it do not interfere with any previous arrangement which you have made."

"And if I had made any, it should cheerfully be put off for your ladyship," replied Deveril, with a warmth of tone which suddenly made Florina start and the colour rush to her cheeks, for there was something in those accents which touched the tenderest chord that thrilled to her heart's core; for she knew that Deveril loved her, and this was another of those unwitting and almost unconscious proofs of that love which from time to time escaped him.

But how did the innocent and artless Florina know that Deveril loved her? Had he ever declared his passion? No, he had not dared to do so, nor had she ever ventured to encourage him in such daring. But to those who love, the signs and evidences of love in others are as intelligible as a language which, though unknown to some, is yet a facile means of interchanging thoughts with those who can speak it. For love has its own peculiar language, which though often ineffable is nevertheless potent in its silent eloquence, — a language whose syllables and words and sentences are expressed by a thousand little circumstances that pass unnoticed by the common observer, but which are full of meaning to those whose hearts afford the key to the reading of those mysteries. Thus a gesture, a suppressed sigh, a look hurriedly given and as hurriedly withdrawn, the flitting blush upon the cheeks, the thrill which is mutually experienced when the hands accidentally come in contact, the visible quivering of the entire form at such contact, the subdued, hushed tone in which words are spoken at one moment, and the suddenly excited warmth with which they are uttered at another, although the words themselves may be merely commonplace, — all these are the signs and emblems and soul-waftings of love. But more, when two beings of kindred dispositions and congenial spirits, and in whose union there appears to be a fitness marked by nature and designated by Heaven, when two such beings meet, although they may give no single one of all those signs of mutual passion, yet is there not such a thing as the soft

and mystic transfusion of souls, taking place by some unknown and ineffable agency, a blending of the spirits such as no gross passion can know and no common nature experience, an interchange of silent whisperings from heart to heart, the whole passing all human understanding?

If the reader can comprehend all this, he will not be surprised that a being so pure and chaste in thought, so stainless and immaculate in soul, so innocent and unsophisticated in all the artifices of the world, so etherealized, in short, not merely above that patrician sphere to which she belonged, but also above humanity itself, there is no need for wonder, we repeat, that such a being as Florina Staunton should have fathomed the secret of William Deveril's heart.

But let us continue the thread of our narrative. She had started and she had blushed as he spoke with such sudden warmth, and yet it was a warmth intelligible only to herself, and which would have had nothing significantly perceptible for any common observer had others been present in the room. And Deveril saw that she had started and that she had blushed, saw likewise that her suddenly excited emotions had left a thrilling quivering behind, and that as she took up the camel's-hair pencil in her fair fingers it trembled as if the hand that held it were an aspen leaf. Then, in the confusion into which his own feelings were suddenly thrown by the incident, he endeavoured to stammer out some excuse, in which attempt his confusion only grew worse confounded.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon — I spoke vehemently — hurriedly — but — but — your ladyship is aware I did not speak disrespectfully — "

"Disrespectfully? Oh, no, Mr. Deveril," she exclaimed, "I know you are incapable of that!" and as she thus spoke, Florina raised her clear deep blue eyes to her preceptor's countenance.

"I thank your ladyship for that assurance," he said, in the low, tremulous tone which indicates feelings proudly moved, and which are almost too full to be restrained, — feelings which while thus threatening to obtain the mastery appear as if they must burst forth in a gush of passionate and tender avowals to the idol of adoration. "What I meant was that I am at all times ready to devote myself so

entirely to your service that every other engagement should be cheerfully put aside."

Florina, having again bent her eyes down upon the ivory, was endeavouring to commence laying in some colour, but her hand trembled, and she at once made a serious fault.

"Oh, you have spoilt your picture!" exclaimed Deveril. "Give me the brush, the colour must be removed directly."

But in his eagerness to take the brush from her their hands came completely in contact, so that Florina's fingers let it fall altogether, and rolling over the ivory it made a number of marks, altogether spoiling the design.

"A thousand apologies for my precipitation!" said Deveril, again overwhelmed with confusion, and taking all the blame unto himself.

"It was not your fault," murmured Florina, in a soft, melting voice, and unconsciously, mechanically, impulsively, she extended her hand as an assurance that she was not offended.

Deveril took that hand, pressed it, found it linger in his own, and retained it in his clasp. Oh, the ineffable bliss of that moment! Then indeed was there the soft transfusion of spirits warmly blending, then was there an indescribable sense of rapture mutually felt. Deveril was no longer master of himself, and yet it was not with a gross passion that he was intoxicated, but with the purest and holiest love that he was elevated to the realms of Elysian bliss. He raised to his lips the hand that still lingered in his own, he kissed it gently and yet fervently, and then, as if astounded and amazed by his audacity, he sank on his knees at Florina's feet, exclaiming, "Pardon, pardon me!"

He had suddenly relinquished her hand, but she gave it to him again in a hurried and bewildered manner, murmuring, in a broken voice, "Rise, Mr. Deveril, for Heaven's sake, rise. If any one should come in, what would be thought, — I who am betrothed to another?" and, suddenly overpowered by this idea, she burst into tears.

"Oh, you weep, you weep!" exclaimed Deveril, starting up from his kneeling posture and resuming his chair by her side. "But those words which you have uttered — they prove — they confirm the wildest hopes — Oh, that this may not be a dream!"

"Mr. Deveril, I am unhappy, very, very unhappy," mur-

mured poor Florina, gazing upon him through her tears. "Leave me, forget this moment of weakness on my part."

"You bid me leave you?" said Deveril, in a mournful voice and with a reproachful look. "What, leave you at a moment when it appeared as if Heaven itself were opening above me?"

"Oh, if I could tell you all I wish to say," exclaimed Florina, with more passionate vehemence than she had ever shown in her life before, "it would relieve my heart. But no, I dare not, I dare not. Leave me."

"And if I leave you thus, are we ever to meet again?" asked Deveril, profoundly afflicted.

Florina hastily wiped away the tears from her eyes, and bending her looks upon the young man, she was about to put forth all the energies of maiden firmness and tell him that it were indeed better they should part to meet no more, when all that firmness melted rapidly away as she gazed upon the exquisite beauty of Deveril's countenance, a beauty which never had seemed more fascinating to her view than at this moment when every feature expressed love, adoration, sorrow, and despair.

"Mr. Deveril," she said, "I cannot give utterance to what I was about to say, for it was an injunction that would have sealed my unhappiness."

"And mine also, if it were to have bidden me leave you," he immediately rejoined, his countenance lighting up with the animation of hope and bliss. "Say, beautiful lady, has not everything which has just taken place gone too far to be recalled, have not secrets been revealed which may never be consigned back to oblivion, and have not two hearts lifted the veil from their innermost sanctuaries? Oh, do not tell me that what is done you could wish to be undone! No, recall not a single gesture nor a single look. To do so were to prove far more cruel than you are capable of proving; it would have been to lift me on angel wings high above the common things of earth, merely to plunge me deep down into an abyss of darkness and despair."

William Deveril had spoken in that tone of mingled rapture, earnestness, hope, and suspense which was full of love's ineffable but varied music, and can be listened to by no young maiden with impunity, so that even if Florina had been far more solemnly and sacredly pledged by vows

of her own to Edmund Saxondale than she was, she would have forgotten all such plight and troth at that instant, because her own feelings were stronger than herself.

"No," she said, murmuringly, as if it were the silvery flow of a crystal streamlet that was wafting soft spirit voices upon its surface, "I wish to recall nothing, I do not now repent of what has just taken place."

"Oh, then you love me, you love me!" exclaimed Deveril, in a tone of swelling enthusiasm and gushing rapture, and again and again did he press to his lips the fair hand that was now completely abandoned to him. "But ah! reflect, Lady Florina," he said, a cloud suddenly settling upon his countenance, "all the brilliant prospects of your life may be at stake. If you condescend to bestow your hand upon me, you become the bride of the humble and obscure artist."

"But I become the bride of him whom I can love," observed Florina, in a low, soft voice, full of an ineffable sincerity.

"And you will renounce the coronet of Saxondale for me?" asked Deveril, his cheeks glowing with rapture.

"Were it a diadem I would renounce it for you," rejoined the patrician maiden.

"Oh, is it possible that such bliss is a reality? Can it be otherwise than a dream?" cried Deveril, once more falling upon his knees at the feet of Lady Florina. Then as he gazed up into her countenance, he said, with a mingled earnestness and impassioned emotion, "If for my sake you consent to sacrifice all those prospects which the world deems brilliant and dazzling, if for the love of me, the humble and obscure artist, you renounce that position which society considers so desirable, you lay me under an immensity of obligation which only can be repaid by a love so fond, so tender, and so faithful that never did poet dream of such a love nor novelist depict it. But is this all that I can give in return for the vastness of the sacrifice which you will make for me? Yes, I can offer you no other riches than the wealth of a heart's devotion, the opulence of feelings that shall have no other aim nor endeavour than to ensure your happiness, the treasure of an enthusiastic adoration of which thine image alone shall ever reign the idol. Such, Florina, is all that I can offer you, all that I can lay at your feet, in return for this love of yours."

"And what more can I ask?" said the maiden, in gentle accents and with tender looks, as she bent down toward her kneeling lover, so that her eyes looked into his own, and her balmy breath fanned his brows that were throbbing with the excitement of ineffable feelings. "You offer me everything calculated to ensure my happiness, and the promptings of my heart tell me that if others seek to control my fate by wedding me to splendid misery and coroneted unhappiness, it is a duty I owe unto myself to accept the destiny which a higher power — I mean that of Heaven — appears to throw in my way."

"Oh, every word that you speak, worshipped and adored Florina, convinces me of the depth of your love and assures me of its enduring constancy. This, this is happiness indeed," and as Deveril spoke he threw his arm around the snowy neck of the beauteous damsel, and drew down the countenance already so close to his own till their lips met, and as he still knelt at Florina's feet, he thus culled the first kiss of the love which was now so fully revealed.

"Rise, rise," said Florina, with murmuring tremulousness of tone, "rise, William, dearest William."

He obeyed her, he rose from his kneeling posture, he again seated himself by her side, but for some minutes his heart was too full to allow the utterance of another word. It was a sort of subdued ecstasy, a prolonged sensation of bliss, wherein his soul was steeped; his heart was bathing in a fount of Elysian delight. The impression of that pure, chaste kiss was still upon his lips, the voice which had just addressed him by his Christian name for the first time was dwelling like a soft strain of delicious music in his ears, and the image of her on whom he gazed in mute adoration was reproduced in his heart, never to be effaced. He felt that whatever should betide him in this world, through whatever storms of adversity or tornadoes of misfortune he might be hurried, to whatever distance circumstances might separate him from the presence of the idolized and adored one, yet that still the sweets of that kiss would linger on his lips, the music of that voice would continue to float in his ears, and the image of that face of transcending beauty would remain indelibly impressed upon his soul.

On the other hand, while all these thoughts and sensations were exercising their beatific influence upon William Deveril,

Florina was likewise busied with kindred reflections, for she felt that whatever barriers might spring up in the way of her union with him whom she thus loved, that still her love would never be impaired, but if there were a possibility of its increasing, it would acquire fresh power in the presence of every difficulty. Nor less could she avoid contrasting this handsome and elegant young man with the insipid-looking and self-sufficient youth to whom her relations sought to sacrifice her. Indeed, carried away by the current of these reflections, she could not help giving audible utterance to them, thereby breaking a long silence, during which she and her lover had sat gazing in mute rapture upon each other.

"I feel that I have been too docile, too obedient," she observed, in a low, soft voice. "I have listened with even a servility of which I am now ashamed, and with a meekness wherein was absorbed all the proper spirit of a woman, to the representations of my aunt Lady Macdonald and to the injunctions of my brother Lord Harold. I never ought to have given an affirmative reply to the suit of Lord Saxondale. But while I, on the one hand, was submitting to the control of an aunt and a brother, he, on the other hand, was acting in accordance with the counsel of his mother. For I now understand it all; this alliance was projected and arranged between the two families, in utter disregard of what my own feelings might be. But, oh, I am not to be disposed of in this manner, nor will I suffer all the brightest and choicest flowers of my heart's spring-time to wither in the sickly atmosphere of society's conventionalisms, nor be crushed beneath the heel of an aunt's or a brother's despotism."

As Florina thus spoke, her beautiful countenance became flushed with excitement, her nostrils dilated, her eyes flashed brightly, her lips curled with decision, and her bosom swelled proudly. Never had she appeared to Deveril's view so truly handsome, so transcendingly lovely, as at this moment when asserting the spirit of a young damsel who felt that she had been coerced, but who had resolved to emancipate herself from the shackles of domestic tyranny.

The reader may rest assured that little progress was made in the drawing-lesson of that day; nevertheless William Deveril remained the full two hours which he had at first

been invited to stop. Is it necessary to enter into details as to how this interval was passed, or can not the reader picture to himself all the tenderness of that scene which followed the mutual confession of love? There were long periods of silence, during which William and Florina sat together, their hands locked, and their spirits blending in the raptured gaze which they fixed upon each other. Then there were intervals of soft and tender discourse, during which vows and pledges were renewed over and over again; and the time flew away so rapidly that the two hours had passed ere the lovers awoke from their dreamy bliss to the consciousness that time was passing at all.

At length Deveril rose to take his departure. Nothing had been settled as to any future course which they were to pursue. They had been too much absorbed in the happiness of the present moment to be able to give serious attention to the circumstances that might arise from Florina's resolve to renounce the coronet of Saxondale and bestow her hand upon the young artist. But, as in all such cases, there seemed to be a tacit yet mutually adopted understanding that for the present their love should be concealed from all the world, that it should remain a secret sacredly treasured up in the sanctuaries of their own hearts, and that they should trust to the chapter of accidents to throw up circumstances in their favour. Thus ever is it with those who love in opposition to the wishes of relatives and friends, for there is a timidity in love which condemns the heart to keep it secret and forbids the lips to proclaim it boldly, even though the resolve be deeply taken that this shall be the only love that can lead to marriage.

After exchanging a fond embrace, William and Florina separated, the former taking his departure from Lady Macdonald's mansion, and the latter remaining alone to enjoy the luxury of a solitude in which she could ponder upon all that had passed.

CHAPTER XXV

A STRANGE SCENE

We have seen that William Deveril had called at Lady Macdonald's mansion precisely at midday to give a drawing-lesson to Lady Florina, but we have also seen that it was a lesson in love that was mutually taken, and that two hours had slipped away almost unnoticed by the lovers. It was therefore two o'clock when Mr. Deveril issued from that mansion, and at this hour he ought, in pursuance of his engagement, to attend at Saxondale House to give lessons to the Honourable Misses Juliana and Constance Farefield. But how could he possibly think of these two ladies when the lovely and beloved Florina filled his heart with her image?

Mechanically, however, he proceeded toward Park Lane; but as he made his way through the streets he had no eyes for the ever-flowing tide of that human ocean which pours its unceasing floods through the great thoroughfares of the metropolis, nor had he any ears for those multitudinous sounds which indicate the bustle, the activity, and the vital energies of the modern Babylon. All his powers of vision as well as all his faculties of thought were concentrated inwardly, absorbed in the delicious contemplation of Florina's image which was impressed upon his heart.

In this mood did he reach the vicinage of Saxondale House, but instead of presenting himself there, he entered Hyde Park and roved about for some time, abandoning himself to those delicious reflections which naturally sprang from the scene described in the preceding chapter. At length he recollected his engagement at Saxondale House. He looked at his watch; it was half-past three o'clock. What should he do? It was doubtless too late to give the Honourable Misses Farefield their lesson, but would it not

appear preeminently disrespectful not to call, offer an apology, and ascertain whether it would be their pleasure to take their lesson on the morrow.

Deciding upon this course, William Deveril bent his way to Saxondale House, and was immediately admitted by the hall porter. He was conducted by a footman up-stairs to the apartment where the two sisters were wont to take their lesson, and he therefore supposed, as he ascended, that they were waiting for him. But on reaching that apartment, instead of perceiving Juliana and Constance there, he found himself in the presence of Lady Saxondale herself.

"You are late, Mr. Deveril," said her ladyship, in a somewhat peculiar tone, so that the young artist's first and most natural thought was that he had offended the haughty patrician lady by his seeming neglect.

"I have to offer your ladyship a thousand apologies," he replied, in a tone and manner, which, while exceedingly courteous and respectful, had nevertheless nothing servile nor grovelling in them.

"Never mind, Mr. Deveril," said her ladyship, "I am not disposed to be angry with you. My daughters waited a little while, and finding you did not come, they went to take an airing in the carriage. But sit down," and she pointed to a chair near the one in which she herself was seated.

"I thank your ladyship," returned Deveril, who still remained standing, "but I will not intrude any longer on your ladyship. Might I ask whether the Honourable Misses Farefield designated an hour for me to come to-morrow?"

"Yes, at two o'clock, if your engagements will permit," answered Lady Saxondale; and still there was something so peculiar in her voice and look that the young artist knew not what to think, and even felt himself troubled, but so vaguely and undefinably that he could not account for this uneasiness. "Sit down, Mr. Deveril," added Lady Saxondale. "I wish to speak to you."

He accordingly took the chair which she indicated, and she at the same moment drew her own a little closer. Then bending forward, with an air of mysterious confidence, she said, "Mr. Deveril, I am desirous of having some very serious discourse with you. You will no doubt be surprised, astonished, at what you will hear, but you must listen."

Lady Saxondale, as she thus spoke, fixed so strange and unfathomable a look upon the young artist that the trouble of his mind increased, he felt embarrassed and confused, a thousand strange ideas instantaneously flitted through his brain, but not one of them settled down there into shape or consistency. He threw a trembling and inquiring look upon Lady Saxondale, and saw that her countenance was flushed, that her eyes were shining with a strange lustre, that her lips were quivering, and that her majestic bust was swelling and falling with great and rapid heavings. Deveril grew almost frightened, and wished to Heaven that he were away from her presence and fairly out of the house, but he dared not, for courtesy's sake, quit her with abruptness.

"Mr. Deveril," resumed Lady Saxondale, in a voice that was tremulously low and strangely deep, "if a lady of high rank, of patrician eminence, should suffer you to know that in spite of all conventionalisms, in spite, too, of all circumstances which ought to seal her lips on such a subject, — ay, and compel her to crush and stifle the feeling itself, — if such a lady, I ask, should suffer you to perceive that you are not indifferent to her, what course would you pursue?"

Deveril was both astounded and alarmed by this singular speech. For an instant he fancied that Lady Saxondale herself was about to make an avowal of love, but instantaneously discarding the idea as ridiculous, he was struck with the conviction that she had somehow or another discovered what had taken place during the few past hours between himself and Florina, and that she was thus delicately and hesitatingly opening the matter to him, so as to remind him of his duty and not deprive her son Lord Saxondale of the maiden whom family arrangements had settled to become the young noble's bride.

"You look astonished, even dismayed, at the words I have just spoken," resumed Lady Saxondale, with every indication of a heightened emotion, so that her splendid form quivered all over, the colour deepened upon her cheeks, her eyes shot forth stranger fires, her bosom heaved and sank with quicker undulations. "But do not be afraid to speak to me candidly on this subject. Let all differences of rank disappear between us."

"I am at a loss to understand your ladyship," stammered Deveril, scarcely knowing what he said.

"No, no, you comprehend me, you understand me full well," rejoined Lady Saxondale, vehemently. "It is impossible you can be under any misapprehension on the subject to which I am alluding. But wherefore do you gaze upon me in this wild and frightened manner? Is it that I have touched the true chord in your heart?"

Lady Saxondale stopped suddenly short, and fixed her eyes with even a deeper earnestness of gaze than before upon William Deveril as she perceived that the colour came and went rapidly on the delicate duskiness of his handsome countenance, for this last remark of her ladyship had confirmed his suspicion that she was indeed alluding to his love for Lady Florina.

"Does your ladyship intend to overwhelm me with — with —" He was about to say "reproaches," but the natural manliness of his spirit instantaneously reviving, he regained his self-possession, and in a calmer and firmer tone observed, "Whatever your ladyship's object may be, I pray you to be explicit."

"Is it possible that you are so blind?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, impatiently. Then, in softer accents and with milder manner, she immediately added, "Mr. Deveril, it is not your fault if you have become the object of so much deep and impassioned love. Start not, but listen to me. Though destiny has cast you in a humble sphere, yet may I say without flattery, that you are one of nature's true aristocracy. Handsome in person, yes, handsome even to the winning of a heart that never loved before, endowed, too, with all the richest treasures of a fine intellect, possessing elegant manners, and a voice that falls like music on the ear and sinks down with ecstatic feeling to the depths of the soul, it is not indeed surprising that you should have thus become the object of a passion which could no longer be concealed. Yes, you are the object of that passion, and it has been long cherished, although never avowed until this day."

William Deveril listened in a sort of stupor of amazement. Every word that Lady Saxondale uttered seemed to allude more and more forcibly to the affection which he entertained for Florina Staunton, but which had never been made known

until this day. And yet, while on the one hand he could scarcely doubt that such was the point to which her ladyship's allusions tended, there was nevertheless a strange misgiving in his mind that it were possible for him to interpret her words wrongly, and that everything she was saying might bear another construction. He was confused, he was bewildered; he longed to speak, to question her, to arrive at some certainty on the point, and yet he feared to give utterance to a single word, lest he should be betrayed into mistake or error. His position was most embarrassing, most painful, and Lady Saxondale could not help seeing that it was so.

"William," she said, and every fibre in his frame thrilled with emotion as he heard himself thus addressed a second time this day by his Christian name from woman's lips, for vividly was brought back to his recollection the ecstatic delight he had ere now experienced when that same Christian name was pronounced in the melting music of Florina's own voice, "William," repeated Lady Saxondale, "tell me, wherefore are you thus moved? Why do you listen to me in such deep embarrassment, I might almost say with pain? Is it possible, I once more ask, that you do not comprehend me?"

"No, no," he cried, vehemently, "I do not comprehend you. For Heaven's sake, explain yourself!"

"Oh, why will you drag from my lips, in the incompetent form of words, those feelings that gush upward from the heart? For the feelings themselves are full of ardour and passion, but words are cooled by the breath on which they are wafted. But if I must be thus explicit, understand me then, at last," and after a moment's pause, Lady Saxondale added, with strong accentuation, "William Deveril, I love you!"

Although from the instant Lady Saxondale had begun this last speech the young artist was prepared for the avowal just made, yet when it did fall from the lady's lips, and that so abruptly, too, he started, and an ejaculation of dismay escaped him. But even then he doubted whether he could have heard aright, or whether his ears had deceived him; and he continued for two or three moments gazing in wonderment and uncertainty upon Lady Saxondale, so that she, with that obtuseness of perception which even the most keen-witted females are liable to in the affairs of the

heart, fancied that he was overwhelmed by his good fortune in being beloved by a lady of her rank and wealth.

"Yes, William, dearest William," she said, in the tenderest tone, and fixing upon him looks brimful of passion, "I love you, I have loved you for some time, and I could conceal it no longer. You know that the world regards me as a woman whose very pride is a guarantee for her virtue, and solemnly, sacredly do I assure you that never before have I stooped from the loftiness of my pedestal to tell any human being that I loved him. But rest assured that I have struggled long to stifle the feeling which thus urges me toward you, and the struggle has been a painful one. I can now struggle no longer; it is a severer conflict than even my proud nature can endure or my strong will carry on. I bow, I yield, I, who never bent or succumbed before. Yes, I bow, I yield, to the influence of love, and you, William Deveril, are the object thereof."

She had gone on speaking thus because the young artist was so paralyzed by the state of his feelings as to be unable to interrupt, much less stop her. Even though her words sounded in his ears, conveying sense and meaning to his comprehension, he could scarcely put faith in what he thus heard; and although he beheld before him that woman of a grand and magnificent beauty descending from the pedestal of her patrician pride, throwing off the Juno-like stateliness of her demeanour, and melting into all the winning graces and sensuous fascinations of Venus herself, yet still he could scarcely believe in the reality of the spectacle which he thus beheld. So he stood near the chair from which he had risen, with eyes fixed wonderingly upon her countenance, with lips apart, the very effigy of astonishment and doubt.

"William, what means this singularity of manner on your part?" asked Lady Saxondale, her accents now tremulous with anxiety and misgiving. "Are you not pleased with this avowal of love which I have so frankly made? But do not mistake me. It is not as a husband that I seek you, it is not as a wife that I offer myself. No, no, the world must not know our love. And therefore it is as a mistress that I abandon myself to you. Yes, this tremendous sacrifice of honour and virtue and all that a woman should hold most dear do I make for the maddening passion that I experience for you. Oh, William, do you refuse such

"TO CLASP HIM IN HER ARMS"
Photogravure from Painting by Bird

"TO CLASP HIM IN HER ARMS"
Photogravure from original by Bird

a love as this? No, you cannot, you will not. But you do not believe that I am serious? Come, let me convince you that I am, let me press you to my bosom."

The infatuated lady, hurried along by the maddening fury of her passions, extended her superb arms to enfold the young artist in their embrace, but he started suddenly back, and with a strong recoil that savoured even of horror and aversion, cried out, " No, no! "

" What, you scorn, you spurn my love? " exclaimed Lady Saxondale, whose pride and vanity would not at the first instant enable her to think that it was really so, although she expressed it in words. " It is impossible. You still think, perhaps, that I am trifling with you, that I am trying you, in order to see that you are a fit preceptor for my daughters? But I take Heaven to witness that I am sincere. What, still you stand gazing upon me thus in consternation and alarm? It is impossible, I repeat, that you can refuse my love. Love? It is a burning, devouring passion, a passion that maddens me, a passion that scorches me with consuming flames, else never, never had I suffered its wild torrent thus to hurry me away. Love, did I say? William Deveril, it is a mad idolatry, in which I could sacrifice almost everything, yes, even the hope of heaven itself, for your sake. Ah, would you have, then, a proof of this fervid love of mine? Behold it in the present scene. You know my pride, you know my haughtiness, and you may conceive, then, how powerful is that love which can thus bend that pride and subdue that haughtiness to the degree that now makes me sue a humble suppliant for your love in return."

" Lady Saxondale," answered William Deveril, again retreating suddenly as she once more flew forward to clasp him in her arms, " is it possible that you can have thus far forgotten yourself, or is the excuse to be found in a passing madness? "

" Yes, yes, it is madness," she exclaimed, with vehement accents, " the madness of this love which I feel for you. And I have asked you to love me in return, and you hesitate. Oh, but you shall love me, you must love me, and love, too, as I do, as passionately, as ardently."

" Peace, madam! " exclaimed Deveril, indignantly. " This scene must not be prolonged another minute."

All on a sudden Lady Saxondale's whole being appeared to change; the crimson hue of excitement vanished from her cheeks, leaving them pale as marble, the sensuous light which had been beaming in her eyes flamed up into flashing fires, the supplicating attitude of her splendid figure was succeeded by an air of Juno-like wrath as she drew herself up to the full of her commanding height, and in a voice choked with rage, she said, " Ah, then you scorn my love, you spurn me, you have dared to humiliate Lady Saxondale? "

" Madam," replied Deveril, " if I remain here even during the few brief moments which are occupied by what I am now saying, it is only because I would not wish you to imagine that I shall go hence from your abode to give publicity to a scene as unexpected as it was painful. Your ladyship speaks of being humiliated, but if you feel so, it need only be so long as I am in your presence. No, I will not make a vaunt of the proposals which in a mood of deplorable weakness you have ventured to make to me. Let the veil of oblivion be dropped over what has passed. And now I bid your ladyship farewell."

" Stop, one moment stop! " said Lady Saxondale, in the deep, hoarse voice of concentrated passion, and she clutched Deveril violently by the arm. " You must not leave me thus. I feel like a desperate woman, capable of desperate deeds. You, sir, are the only man I ever loved, and to have this first love of mine thus rejected, thus spurned — no, by Heaven, it shall not be! " and in the madness of her rage she stamped her foot violently on the carpet.

Deveril, shocked and horrified at what was taking place, burst from the strong grasp in which Lady Saxondale held him, and was hastening to the door, when she bounded after him, and caught him by the arm again, crying, " Stop, I command you to stop! Beware how you irritate me. I am not mistress of my actions, and if you attempt to escape from me again, ere I have said all that I have to say, there will be a struggle, and you know it will be playing a coward's part to do violence to a woman."

" Lady Saxondale," said the young artist, painfully excited and scarcely knowing how to act, " I will remain a few minutes and listen to what you have to say, if you will only tranquillize your feelings, for I really do not wish that

you should incur the chance of exposure before your household. At the same time, I warn your ladyship not to address me again in language that is derogatory to yourself and insulting to me."

"Insulting to you, foolish boy?" said Lady Saxondale, and the words came hissing forth on her panting breath, while every feature of her handsome countenance was convulsed with passion, a passion in which the fury of desire was mingled with the rage of disappointment and the deep sense of mortification. "Have you refused my love because there is such disparity in our ages? It is true that there are many years' difference between us, but am I not handsome, am I not in the proud glory of my beauty? Look at this hair, is there one line of silver in it? Look at this face, is there a wrinkle upon it? Look at this form, has time done aught to mar its symmetry? No, no," she added, with increasing excitement, "I not only love, but I have the consciousness of being lovable. And if my mirror told me false in that respect, think you that the handsomest and proudest peers of England, who when seeking my hand have told me that I was beautiful, have spoken thus in mere idle flattery? Once again, then, William Deveril — "

"No, lady, not again, not even once again!" he cried, now stricken with the conviction that every moment which he gave up to a prolongation of this scene was a treachery and an insult to that sweet patrician girl who but a few hours previously had breathed a revelation of purest and chastest love in his ear.

"Ah, then yours is a heart of adamant and will not be moved," exclaimed Lady Saxondale. "But perhaps you love another?" and her whole form quivered with rage as the bare idea struck her with an ice-chill, smiting her proud heart as if it would rend it in twain.

"Love another?" echoed the young artist, mechanically, for again he trembled lest his secret should be surprised.

"Yes, love another," promptly rejoined Lady Saxondale. "I said so, and I see that it is the case. Oh, that telltale look of yours reveals the secret! Then I have a rival? Ah! rivalry encourages bad passions, it excites vengeance, and by the heaven above us, William Deveril, if my love be spurned for that of any puling, sentimental girl, the revenge that I will wreak shall be terrible."

"Good heavens, Lady Saxondale!" exclaimed the young artist, thinking of Florina, "you know not what you say."

"But I have told you what I will do," responded the infuriate woman, for infuriate she now really was. "Beware how you continue to spurn my love. Say but one kind word, and I will forgive all that has passed."

"Madam, I can bear this no longer," cried Deveril, once more breaking away from her.

"Stop!" she exclaimed, a third time catching him by the arm, and with such power, too, that he could not have escaped, without exerting more violence than his generous nature would permit him to do toward a female. "I have but a single word now to say. Give me your love, William, and I will worship you; persist in refusing me, and I become your bitterest enemy."

Having thus spoken, with flashing eyes, pale countenance, quivering lips, and trembling form, she suddenly released him of her own accord, and he found himself free.

"Lady Saxondale," he answered, "when this tempest of passion has subsided, you will be sorry for what has passed."

"Sorry? No," she cried, now drawing herself up once more with sovereign hauteur, so that her majestic beauty seemed terrible in this storm of rage and indignation, "that word is not one which can be applied to Lady Saxondale. Instead of experiencing sorrow, I shall look for vengeance. If your mind be made up, mine is also. I could have sacrificed everything to enjoy your love, but I cannot endure to be humiliated by this rejection of my own. Much therefore as I could have loved you, I am prepared to hate you. Which is to be the alternative?"

"Madam," answered Deveril, "this scene has already lasted much too long, and your conduct toward me has passed from indelicacy to insult."

"Begone, then, sir!" she exclaimed, the fires of all possible human passions flashing from her eyes. "I hate you, and I will be revenged."

William Deveril bowed coldly and quitted the room. In a couple of minutes he crossed the threshold of Saxondale House, and returned once more into Hyde Park, to compose the feelings that had been so much excited by the strange and painful ordeal through which he had just passed.

It appeared as if he had just wakened up from a dream the influence of which pursued him even when he was awake. Was it possible that the proud, the dignified, the haughty Lady Saxondale had so far forgotten her wonted self-possession as to expose herself in such a manner? But by a natural transition of ideas, the young artist was led to contrast the sensuous fervour and immodest passion of that lady with the chaste love and delicate affection of the beauteous Florina. Then, still pursuing the thread of his reflections, he could not help trembling at the satanic threats of vengeance which Lady Saxondale had hurled at his head, — and not at his head alone, but at that of whomsoever she might detect in being what she chose to regard as a rival. Deveril saw that she was a desperate and dangerous woman, — a woman whom her disappointed passion had rendered thus desperate, and who was likely to prove all the more dangerous because she possessed the strongest energies, which she would not fail to exercise in the pursuit of any object she was anxious to attain.

But what was he to do? Should he confidentially impart to Florina's ear everything that had occurred, and thus put the young maiden upon her guard in case Lady Saxondale should by any accident discover that the object of his love was none other than the same being who had been selected to become her own son's bride? No, the honourable and upright mind of Deveril recoiled from the bare idea of shocking the pure and chaste Florina by the tale of her ladyship's depravity, and he therefore came to the resolve to observe the strictest secrecy in respect to all that had just taken place.

It was now five o'clock, and Deveril, quitting Hyde Park, bent his way to a lodging which he had in Pall Mall. Not that he habitually resided there, for he had another place of residence in one of the suburbs of London. But this lodging, consisting of three apartments, served as the place where he received letters and visits in respect to the profession he exercised. One of the rooms was fitted up as a studio, where he gave lessons to those who preferred to visit him there, another room was used as a parlour, and a third as a bedchamber, in case it suited him to sleep at his lodgings.

On returning to Pall Mall he found two or three persons waiting to see him on matters of business, and when they

had taken their departure he ordered some dinner to be served up. Little appetite however had the young artist for the food thus placed upon the table. His thoughts were too much absorbed, or, rather, too pleasurably and painfully divided between the two scenes which had marked this memorable day. It was not till past nine o'clock that he quitted his lodging, and the evening being exceedingly beautiful, he determined to walk to his suburban residence, for he felt that exercise and fresh air would soothe the excitement of his thoughts.

It was ten o'clock as William Deveril entered the Regent's Park, across which his path lay in the direction of a splendid mansion somewhat isolated from the rest of the superb residences which abound in that district. The evening was warm, some of the casements of that mansion were open, and the swelling tide of music flowed forth to his ear. That music was accompanied by several sweet female voices, and so exquisitely did they sing that the young artist, as passionately fond of music as he was of drawing, stood still to listen. He was enabled to approach to within half a dozen yards of the fence bounding the garden in which the mansion stood, and it was from the open casement of a room on the first floor that the delicious strains of vocal and instrumental harmony were wafted forth. This casement was the side window of a drawing-room whose front, with a range of several windows, looked in another direction upon an ampler spread of grounds; and the side window to which we have alluded opened on a balcony toward which the luxuriant clematis and jasmine, mingling with roses crept up against the wall.

As William Deveril stood listening to the music, he recollected that Florina had mentioned to him during the two hours they had passed together that day that she was going to a party with her aunt Lady Macdonald to the house of some friends in the Regent's Park that evening; and as the young artist stood gazing up at the open casement, the crimson draperies of which gave a roseate hue to the light shining forth from the interior of the room, he thought to himself, " Perhaps it is here that my beloved Florina is now gracing the brilliant assemblage with her presence? Ah! was it some instinctive feeling of this kind which made me prefer walking home to-night, which made

me take this exact path, and which now caused me to halt here close by this stately mansion? "

While he was thus musing to himself, the harmony had ceased, the soft sounds of the music and the equally delicious voices no longer sent forth their fluid notes to the starlit air, and Deveril was about to pursue his way, scarcely able to repress a sigh as he thought that if Florina were indeed there, some aristocratic coxcomb perchance was privileged to lead her through the mazes of the dance, while he who possessed her love was wandering around the exterior of that luxurious mansion.

At the very moment he was turning away, the crimson drapery was drawn aside, and a lady appeared upon the balcony, as if to escape for a few moments from the stifling heat within and breathe the fresher and purer air of the night. But that lady was Florina! Yes, Florina, elegantly dressed, looking radiantly beautiful in her ballroom toilet, — Florina, the idol of the young artist's worship.

An ejaculation of joy and delight burst from Deveril's lips. Florina started, and was about to retreat from the balcony, but Deveril breathed her name in a soft voice, yet just loud enough for her to hear. And she did hear it, and by the light which shone through the crimson draperies the enraptured Deveril could perceive that the young maiden's countenance became suddenly animated with ineffable pleasure as she recognized him. But it was dangerous to attempt any communication under circumstances where notice might be attracted, and so the interchange of whatever the lovers might have to say was limited to signs. Florina waved her snowy handkerchief to the young artist, and he, responding in a similar manner to that mute but recognized signal of love, passed lingeringly away.

He saw Florina push aside the draperies again and disappear behind them; then rejoicing that he had thus caught a glimpse of his adored one, though only for such a brief passing instant, he sped onward with a lighter heart to his own residence, which was at no very great distance.

But as William Deveril entered the hall of a beautiful little villa which he thus occupied in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park, a charming creature of angelic beauty came forth from the parlour to welcome him, and even to chide him affectionately for being so late. Who was this

beautiful creature that thus showed herself so anxious for his return, and whom he embraced so fondly as he made some excuse for his lateness? Ah! from this mystery we cannot at present draw the veil, even though it were to relieve the reader from uncertainty as to whether William Deveril had that day pledged an undivided love to Florina Staunton.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FABRICATION

Nothing could exceed the rage and disappointment of Lady Saxondale at the rebuff she had experienced from William Deveril. We must inform the reader that from the very first moment he commenced giving lessons to the Misses Farefield, at Saxondale House, several months back, her ladyship had conceived a strange and irresistible attachment toward that handsome young man. At the beginning Lady Saxondale had endeavoured to put away this feeling, with as much calm confidence that she would succeed in doing so as if she were divesting herself of a garment which, though fitting somewhat tight, she had no doubt of being able to lay aside; but insensibly that attachment grew upon her, and though she was long ere she would admit this circumstance to herself, yet she could not help at last opening her eyes deliberately to the fact that she really loved William Deveril.

It was perfectly true that Lady Saxondale struggled long and painfully against this growing passion; true also that it acquired a power greater than her own faculty of resistance. We may likewise observe that she had spoken with equal truth when informing Deveril that she had never loved before. The reader is well aware that she had not married old Lord Saxondale for love, and that though she had been true and faithful to him, had treated him with kindness, and had therefore made him a good wife, she had never experienced for him any sentiment beyond those of friendship and gratitude. At his death, though left a young, beautiful, and rich widow, she had never thought of changing her condition, simply because out of the many offers which she received, not one was made by any individual of a

rank so much superior to her own as to make her wish to aspire to it. As for love, she encountered no one capable of inspiring her with that sentiment. Thus remaining single, she had pursued only one idea, and this was her ambition.

She looked upon herself with pride and satisfaction as having been the means of perpetuating the race of Saxondale in a direct line from her husband, and in having rescued the coronet and estates from the grasp of a profligate and unprincipled man in the person of Ralph Farefield. Her ambition had therefore been, from the time of her husband's death, to rear Edmund Saxondale, to watch over him with the most zealous care, and to cherish him as the only prop upon which the proud title of Saxondale now rested. For there was no other direct male heir to that title known to exist, and if Edmund died, the title would become extinct and the estates would devolve to a very distant relative owning a ducal rank, and in which the title of Saxondale would consequently be merged and lost. We will not now pause to describe all Lady Saxondale had suffered on perceiving the gradual development of Edmund's evil qualities as he grew up, but we will content ourselves with observing that if she could not love him, she nevertheless cherished him as the only hope of perpetuating the family into which she had married and of which she was so proud.

This was Lady Saxondale's ambition. The same explanations may likewise account for her apparently premature anxiety to make such matrimonial arrangements on behalf of Edmund, as would provide him with a wife the moment he should come of age. Hence the selection of Lady Florina, a high-born though portionless damsel, whose relations and friends had been too willing to assent to her prospective sacrifice to the sickly, ill-conditioned, and evil-minded Lord Saxondale. It was now the aim of her ladyship's ambition to see Edmund married and behold male issue springing from the union, so that she might be assured of the perpetuation of the race of Saxondale. With this ambition constituting, as it were, the aim of her existence, it was not likely that such a woman would be easily accessible to the more tender sentiment of love. She was too worldly-minded to be thus sensitive. But had she not passions? Yes, but she had also the pride that enabled her to control them. She had not remained virtuous for the love of virtue,

but because she was too prudent and too cautious to endanger her proud position in the world. She had not remained chaste through any genuine sentiment of feminine purity, but because she did not choose to risk the consequences of an intrigue. Thus, when she had found her passions rebelling, she had subdued them, and when tempted by the overtures of the gallant and the dissipated in the world of fashion, she had risen superior to such temptations, not because she possessed a virtue that recoiled from them, but because she was too proud to compromise herself by succumbing to them.

Such had been the history of Lady Saxondale's life from the period of her husband's death until that when she met William Deveril. For nineteen years had she remained inaccessible to love or to temptation, and now she not only experienced love but invited temptation by becoming herself the temptress. Severely and painfully, we repeat, had she struggled against this passion which she felt for Deveril, but at length she found that it was consuming her. She had endeavoured to avoid meeting him when he came to the house to give lessons to her daughters, but an irresistible impulse would urge her to the room where she might see him. She had struggled to banish his image from her mind; as vainly might she have essayed to roll back with her hand the mighty volume of water which the Thames pours into the sea at the time of its ebb. The strength of her mind gradually gave way in this one respect: namely, the irresistible passion she experienced for Deveril. She felt at last that she must avow this love of hers to him, if such a passion deserved the name of love at all. Not for a moment did she anticipate a repulse. On the contrary, naturally judging from what she constantly beheld passing around her in the great world, she had expected that the humble artist would rejoice at being invited to become the paramour of a lady of rank and riches.

Great, then, was her rage, infinite her disappointment, and cruel her sense of humiliation, at the rebuff she had experienced. That it was through any purely virtuous feeling on William Deveril's part, she could scarcely imagine, but she believed it to be because he loved another, and was so infatuated with this love that, unlike the young men of the aristocratic world, he would have considered it a crime

to prove unfaithful to it. Whosoever therefore the object of this love might be, Lady Saxondale was fully prepared to regard and to treat her as a rival; and thus was this woman, naturally so proud, so strong-minded, and so dignified in her conduct, ready to descend to the meanness of jealousy, the paltriness of envy, and the pettiness of revenge, in a matter where after all she herself had sustained no substantial nor real injury. But where a woman's passion is concerned, her whole nature becomes warped according to circumstances and influences.

Ungenerous herself in the course which she was thus prepared to pursue, Lady Saxondale could not help fancying that Deveril was equally likely to take an ungenerous advantage of the scene which had placed her in his power. In short, she believed that he was likely, in consequence of her threats, to spread the story of her overtures and his refusal. At all events, she argued, if he did not do so at once he would hereafter, when he found that she had given utterance to no idle threats, but was pursuing him and her rival, whoever she might be, with her implacable resentment. Therefore she resolved to be beforehand with him in all respects, and by telling the story herself, put upon it the complexion that would suit her own interests, and throw complete discredit on any counter-statement he might hereafter make.

So soon as William Deveril had parted from Lady Saxondale in the manner described in the previous chapter, she promptly composed her feelings, and ringing the bell, inquired whether her daughters had returned from their ride in the carriage. She was answered in the negative, and she therefore waited patiently till they came back. On their arrival the young ladies, hearing that their mother had inquired for them, hastened to put off their bonnets and shawls, and then proceeded to the drawing-room where her ladyship was now seated.

"My dear girls," she said, in a far more caressing and lively manner than she was wont to adopt toward them, especially in respect to the eldest, Juliana, "you will never conjecture how singular a scene has been taking place during your absence."

"At all events, my dear mother," answered Constance, "it was of no very serious character, for you are gay over

it, and therefore your words have caused me little uneasiness, but much curiosity."

"The scene was too ludicrous to be serious," continued Lady Saxondale. "What will you think when I tell you that I have had a declaration of love and an offer of marriage?"

"What! you, mother?" exclaimed Juliana. "From some old nobleman, I suppose?"

"The remark is scarcely respectful, miss," returned Lady Saxondale, now suddenly recovering her wonted dignity, blended with hauteur, "for I presume you intended me to understand that only an old nobleman would be likely to seek my hand in marriage."

"Well, tell us this adventure of yours, then," said Juliana, not in the most respectful tone, for the reader has already seen that this young lady was by no means the pattern of a dutiful daughter.

"Yes, tell us what has happened, my dear mother," asked Constance, who was far more affectionate and docile to her parent.

"It is perfectly true," continued Lady Saxondale, addressing herself more to Constance than to Juliana, "that I have received an offer, but I think when I tell you from whom it came, you will say that I have even less reason to be proud of the proposal than if it had been made by some old nobleman such as Juliana has referred to."

"Who, then, was it?" inquired Constance.

"Your preceptor, Mr. Deveril," responded Lady Saxondale.

An ejaculation of the most unfeigned surprise burst from the lips both of Juliana and Constance.

"It is really the case," continued their mother. "You know that you waited for him some little time this afternoon, and as he did not make his appearance, you went out. But you left a message that if he called he was to be asked to come to-morrow. Now, as I always regarded him as a very civil, well-behaved, nice young man, I did not choose to mortify him by leaving that message to be delivered by the servants, so I allowed him to be shown up when he came, and having received his apology for the lateness of his arrival, I gave your message. I don't know if I spoke in a more affable tone than usual, but certain it is that he sat down

and began conversing in a way which I considered to be somewhat familiar. I showed a little impatience at this, when he suddenly entered upon the most extravagant declarations. I scarcely know how he began them, but I recollect that I was so taken with astonishment that I allowed him to proceed uninterruptedly for some time. To be brief, he flung himself at my feet, gave utterance to a thousand ridiculous things borrowed from the rhapsodies which lovers are made to utter in novels and romances, besought me to have pity on him, and vowed if I did not, he should kill himself in despair."

" Is this possible? " asked Juliana, eying her mother with something like doubt and suspicion in her looks.

" Good heavens, what insolence! " cried the younger daughter, who on the other hand implicitly believed every word her ladyship uttered.

" Insolence indeed! " echoed Lady Saxondale, not appearing to observe the manner in which Juliana surveyed her, " and yet I can scarcely call it insolence, because it was such pure unmitigated folly. However, I sent him away from my presence, and ordered him never to come to the house again."

" I am surprised at Mr. Deveril," said Constance. " I always thought he was an unassuming, well-behaved, and discreet young man, — a very superior young man indeed, quite a gentleman — "

" And utterly incapable of such egregious folly," added Juliana. " At least," she immediately said, observing that Lady Saxondale fixed her eyes sternly upon her, " he is the last man in existence that I should have thought likely to commit himself so absurdly. The only excuse to be found for him is that it was a transient touch of insanity."

" Perhaps so," observed Lady Saxondale.

She then continued to discourse upon the subject with her two daughters a little longer, after which she retired to her own chamber to dress for dinner. But she had now a new cause for spite and vexation, she having seen full well that she was not believed by her eldest daughter.

" Well, Constance," said this young lady to her sister, the moment they were alone together, " what think you of the tale that has just been told us? "

" That Mr. Deveril's conduct was most extraordinary,"

replied Constance, not perceiving the real drift of her sister's question.

"And so it would have been if everything took place exactly as our mother has chosen to represent it," observed Juliana.

"What do you mean?" asked Constance, in astonishment.

"I mean that there is something more in all this than her ladyship has chosen to tell us. Is it likely, is it natural, that a young man like Mr. Deveril would fall so desperately in love with a woman of our mother's age?"

"Not so very old," interrupted Constance, "only just forty, and you must admit that mamma is superbly handsome."

"Granted. But if she is forty, Mr. Deveril is not more than twenty," rejoined Juliana, "and it is not likely, I repeat, that he should fall head over ears in love with a woman double his age, for it could only be in the madness and intoxication of such a love that he would have ventured to demand our mother's hand in marriage. In plain terms, Constance, I do not believe the story, and we will find out something more about it ere long."

"But why should mamma tell so wicked a falsehood?" asked the younger sister, reproachfully.

"Oh, why, why, why — you always ask why to everything," exclaimed Juliana, petulantly. "Of course one may see things or suspect things, and yet not always know the reason why. How is it that our mother is so desperately frightened of that old wretch Mabel, whom I hate as cordially as possible? How is it, again, that our mother gave an audience in such a hurry to that old woman the other night that I told you about — "

At this moment a lady's-maid entered to intimate that it was time to dress for dinner, and the colloquy between the two sisters was accordingly cut short.

Little did Lady Saxondale sleep during the night that followed this day of her discomfiture and defeat in respect to William Deveril. She lay tossing upon her downy couch as if it were the hardest and most uncomfortable mattress that ever belonged to a pauper's garret. Or we might even go farther and say that many a poor creature that night slept a sweeter sleep upon straw than the great patrician lady

was enabled to woo to her eyes though lying in that sumptuous bed. Her heart felt as if scorpions were tearing it, for though she had declared that she could hate Deveril as keenly as she had loved him, — and though she was even meditating revenge, — yet was she still devoured by a consuming passion for that splendidly handsome young man. And she was tortured, too, with jealousy on account of the unknown rival to whom she felt assured his heart was devoted, and whom she longed to punish.

When morning dawned Lady Saxondale arose from the sumptuous couch where she had only been enabled to snatch a few hours of troubled slumber, — a slumber too which was haunted with feverish dreams. She looked at herself in the glass, and, perceiving that she was pale and somewhat careworn, she stamped her foot impatiently, muttering to herself, "New cares, new sources of annoyance and vexation, arising up around me. This must not be."

And yet she did not put a stop to any of these self-created sources of vexation by at once abandoning her projects of vengeance in respect to William Deveril. No; the strong-minded woman was now enslaved by her passions, — those passions which for so many long years she had dominated as an empress-tyrant keeps her foot upon the neck of a rebellious people.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon that Lady Saxondale's carriage stopped at the house of Lady Macdonald in Cavendish Square, and as she ascended toward the drawing-room, she settled her countenance in such a manner that it seemed to wear a look as if a sense of some ludicrous yet disagreeable scene were lingering in the mind. Lady Macdonald and Florina were seated together in the drawing-room when Lady Saxondale was announced, and they both at once observed the singular look which her ladyship's features thus wore.

"Has anything unpleasant occurred, my dear friend?" asked Lady Macdonald, when the usual greetings and complimentary inquiries were exchanged.

"Unpleasant?" echoed Lady Saxondale, as if surprised that she should be thus questioned. "Oh, I suppose that my looks must have reflected somewhat of the topic I was revolving in my mind as I rode hither. Well, I did not mean to tell you, but after all, I do not know why I should keep

it secret," and her ladyship now laughed with every appearance of a genuine merriment.

"At all events it is nothing seriously unpleasant," said Lady Macdonald.

"Rather ludicrous and amusing than unpleasant," responded Lady Saxondale. "And yet it is annoying, too, because," she added, with dignity, "I flatter myself that there could not possibly be anything in my manner, much less in my conduct, to give the slightest encouragement — "

"My dear friend, you are speaking in enigmas," said Lady Macdonald, as Lady Saxondale paused. "Neither Florina nor I can understand to what you are alluding. And yet in the sphere in which we move, people do seem to be growing mysterious and incomprehensible. Here's my niece, who has been so abstracted and thoughtful all the morning — "

"By the bye, my dear Florina," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, as if suddenly reminded of something by the aunt's allusion to the young lady, "now that I think of it, you receive lessons from a certain Mr. William Deveril, do you not? "

The sudden appearance of a ghost would not have produced a more startling effect upon the lovely Florina than this question so abruptly and unexpectedly put. She turned red and pale in rapid transitions, half-sprang from her seat, and then surveyed Lady Saxondale in a sort of stupor of amazement.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Flo? " asked her ladyship, at first utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this emotion which her words had excited on the part of the young lady; then all in an instant a suspicion of the truth flashed to her mind, for the eyes of jealousy are keen and sharp as needles.

"You changed the conversation so abruptly, my dear Lady Saxondale," answered Florina, slowly recovering herself and endeavouring to smile, though the attempt was not very successful, "that you quite startled me."

"I too noticed how strange you looked, Flo," exclaimed Lady Macdonald, "but I suppose that when one is abstracted and thoughtful, to have a question suddenly put shakes the nerves. However, Lady Saxondale has evidently something to say concerning that Mr. Deveril who gives you lessons, Flo."

"The most amusing thing in the world," exclaimed her ladyship, pretending rather to address herself to the aunt than to the niece, but furtively surveying the latter with a scrutinizing intentness from the corners of her eyes. "Would you believe it? — this Mr. Deveril who has obtained such renown by his talents and is so extensively patronized in the circles of rank and fashion seems to have had his head turned by his good fortune. For my part, I always considered him to be a well-behaved unassuming young man, of a sufficiently independent spirit for one of his sex and intelligence, but totally devoid of any insolent pretensions."

"That is precisely the opinion which I had formed of him," observed Lady Macdonald, "and I should really feel grieved to be compelled to alter it. What has happened?"

Florina said nothing, but awaited with a torturing suspense the reply that should be given to the question her aunt had just put to Lady Saxondale. She was naturally filled with the strangest misgivings, and even while waiting for the clearing up of her uncertainty and doubt, she felt a thousand wild conjectures sweeping through her brain; for under such painful circumstances one seems to live an entire age in a single minute, and to be tossed upon a sea of troubled emotions vast enough to fill a century, although compressed at the time into the space of a few instants. She however did her best to conceal what she experienced. Her aunt was not noticing her, nor did Lady Saxondale appear to be doing so either, though in reality the latter lost not a single gleam or shade of those feelings that found a swift brief flitting expression upon the young maiden's features.

"You asked me what has happened, my dear friend?" resumed Lady Saxondale, in reply to Lady Macdonald's question. "You really never would guess. and you will scarcely know how to believe me when I tell you. In one sense you will perhaps say that I ought to feel complimented, in another indignant and angry, and in a third sense wonderfully amused and diverted."

"I already begin to understand your meaning," said Lady Macdonald, in astonishment. "But is it really possible — "

"So possible," returned Lady Saxondale, "that it did actually take place."

All this was torture and excruciation for poor Florina, and Lady Saxondale saw it. Every varied expression which swept over the young maiden's countenance, and every new effort which she made to conceal her emotions, tended to confirm Lady Saxondale's suspicion that she now knew who her rival was in the love of William Deveril. Therefore, to deal in bare allusions without coming immediately to the point itself was now a source of malignant pleasure to the jealous lady. She saw how she was torturing poor Florina, how she was angling as it were with her feelings, and she endeavoured to prolong this cruel game as much as possible.

"Yes, my dear friend," she continued, still appearing to address herself almost entirely to Lady Macdonald, "what you in your shrewdness have already conjectured did really take place. You may conceive my astonishment. But who would have thought it of this Mr. Deveril? A young man of his intelligence to be so besotted. A person of his apparent good breeding to be so utterly ignorant of the ordinary proprieties of life, or at least so far to forget them. Is it not strange?"

"Very strange indeed," returned Lady Macdonald. "And yet persons in our sphere of life are liable to the impertinences of presumptuous coxcombs."

"That is exactly what Mr. Deveril is," observed Lady Saxondale, and she saw that poor Florina was literally writhing on her chair under these cruel inflictions. "The poor, silly fool, because he is rather good-looking, has got some little talent, and has been petted and made much of in the houses of the aristocracy to which he has obtained admittance as a preceptor, fancies that the civilities shown him are of a different character from what they seem —"

"But you have not yet told us," interrupted Lady Macdonald, "exactly what it is that this Mr. Deveril has done, although from the remarks you have made, I have not much trouble to guess. In short, I suppose that he has dared to fancy that your ladyship was in love with him?"

"Precisely so," returned Lady Saxondale, who now had the secret satisfaction of noticing with her furtive glances that poor Florina was so cruelly tortured as to have been compelled surreptitiously to wipe away the tears which had started from her eyes. "The incident happened yesterday,"

continued Lady Saxondale, dwelling with a fiendish delight upon her words, as she knew that every syllable fell like successive drops of molten lead upon the most sensitive fibres of Florina's heart. "The girls had gone out for an airing, and I was alone. Mr. Deveril was shown up, because I had a message to deliver from Juliana and Constance. It was merely, as you might suppose, to make arrangements for the days and the hours when they would take their lessons in future. It struck me that there was something very peculiar in the young man's look and manner, — a flushing of the cheeks, a trembling and a hesitation in the speech, an embarrassment and an awkwardness, as if he wanted to say something, but dared not. It naturally occurred to me that he had some favour to ask, — perhaps an advance of money, or something of the kind; and feeling really willing to oblige him, but little suspecting what was agitating in his mind, I said something to encourage him to proceed. Then he burst forth into the most impassioned declarations. I listened with astonishment, thinking that he had either gone mad or was reciting some rhapsody from a novel. But as his language grew more vehement and his meaning less and less mistakable, I rose indignantly from my seat. Then he threw himself upon his knees before me, vowing that his happiness — his very life — was in my hands, and that if I did not have mercy upon him he should kill himself in despair."

"I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed Lady Macdonald. "And to think that I should have allowed such an improper person to give lessons to Florina, and to be alone with her."

"But I had done the same in respect to my daughters, without ever thinking that the young man was capable of so much infatuation or arrogance, whichever it may be. And yet," continued Lady Saxondale, affecting to laugh gaily, "I really ought to consider myself highly complimented at being thus chosen as the object of his tenderness, when amongst his pupils there were younger and fairer ladies. Really, Flo," she added, now turning toward the soul-tortured maiden, "I am surprised that in his impudence and presumption he has never thrown himself at your feet."

Florina was indeed suffering a martyrdom which was all

the more acute, all the more intense, because she dared not give vent to the expression of her agonies in ejaculations or in tears, but was compelled to strain every nerve and exert every effort to conceal them. The colour had however entirely forsaken her cheeks, she looked unnaturally pale and cold, and the smile which she forced herself to assume at Lady Saxondale's remarks was wan and sickly.

"But how did this extraordinary romance end?" asked Lady Macdonald, who, not dreaming that her niece had any extraordinary interest in the conversation, did not pay particular attention to her.

"It terminated, my dear friend," answered Lady Saxondale, "in the only way in which such a proceeding could end. With indignation did I expel Mr. Deveril from my presence, commanding him never to approach the door of Saxondale House again. He went away, muttering threats of revenge, but terribly crestfallen. Now really, I do not wish to inflict an injury upon the poor infatuated, presumptuous young man, but of course I cannot, by passing the matter over in silence, permit him to continue his visits at the houses of my friends."

"I for one shall order the door to be shut in his face next time he comes hither," exclaimed Lady Macdonald, "and I am sure that our dear Florina is as much obliged as I am to your ladyship for having thus lost no time in making us aware of the dangerous character of this young man. And so he threatened you, my dear friend, did he?"

"Yes, but that is always the last resource of vulgar minds," responded Lady Saxondale. "You may readily suppose I cared nothing for his threats —"

"Certainly not," rejoined Lady Macdonald. "Persons in our sphere are beyond the reach of such malevolence. Probably you will have a letter full of contrition in the course of the day."

"Ah! I forgot to observe," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, catching at a remark which thus afforded her a hint for another well-seeming falsehood, "that he sent one this morning, but as a matter of course I returned it unopened. And now I must say farewell, for I have got a round of visits to pay."

"And of course you will not forget to put all your friends

on their guard against this young man?" said Lady Macdonald.

"It is my duty, and though really a painful one, I shall fulfil it. Good-bye, my dear friend. Good-bye, dear Flo."

Then, with every appearance of the most affectionate cordiality, did Lady Saxondale press the hand of the young maiden into whose heart she had been planting daggers for a whole half-hour; and without seeming to notice that her unfortunate victim deeply and keenly felt the wounds thus inflicted, her ladyship passed with her wonted mien of graceful dignity out of the room. Florina sought the shade of a window recess, as if to observe her ladyship take her departure in her splendid equipage, but in reality to conceal the tears which were now gushing forth from her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SISTERS

In the meantime a scene of some interest was passing at Saxondale House. Juliana and Constance were seated together in an apartment specially devoted to their own use, and where they were wont to practise their music, skim the fashionable novels of the day, and receive their lessons in painting from William Deveril.

We have already stated that Juliana was a perfect likeness of her mother, possessing the same aquiline profile, with its aristocratic haughtiness of expression subdued not so much by a natural feminine softness as by a melting sensuousness of look. A keen observer, well skilled in the reading of the human physiognomy, could not have failed to observe that Juliana was a young woman of strong passions, — the evidence of which might be read in her eyes, the dewy moisture of her lips, and the voluptuous contours of her form. Being in her twenty-third year, the reader may perhaps wonder — especially as she was so exceedingly handsome — that she remained unmarried. Assuredly it was through no fault of her own, nor that of her mother, for Lady Saxondale, without actually condescending to any of those vulgar manœuvres to which match-making parents have recourse to secure husbands for their daughters, had done her best to " get off," as the term is, both Juliana and Constance. Juliana too had endeavoured to win more than one heart, but somehow or another she had never received an offer which was deemed eligible enough to be accepted. Perhaps it was that she had no fortune of her own; or perhaps, despite her fine person, she was not one of those really lovable beings by whom a man was likely to be captivated. Certain it is that at this age when girlhood had completely

expanded into womanhood, the Honourable Miss Farefield was still unmarried. But did she love? Was there an image constantly uppermost in her heart, and upon which she dwelt day and night? The reader has already received more than one hint to that effect, and in this chapter he will hear still further upon the subject.

But first let us say a word or two with regard to Constance. She was altogether of a different style of beauty from her sister, save in respect to the well-developed proportions of her figure; but she had light hair, a very fair complexion, and soft blue eyes, while Juliana's hair was of raven darkness, her eyes were black and brilliant, and her complexion was of a clear, delicate olive. Juliana possessed sentiments more refined and feelings more ethereal than her sister. The same strong passions did not agitate in her soul, and the love of which she was susceptible may be described as of a far purer and chaster kind than that which could alone occupy the heart of the elder young lady.

While their mother was paying her visit to Lady Macdonald, Juliana and Constance, each dressed in an elegant negligee, were seated together, as already described, in the apartment where their mornings were generally passed, for although it was now really the afternoon so far as the proper divisions of time went, yet it is always morning in the fashionable world until the dinner-hour, even though this should be as late as six or seven o'clock. The two sisters had been conversing on the incident of the previous day, namely, the story which their mother had told them relative to William Deveril, and by a not unnatural transition they were led on to topics of a more tender, intimate, and secret character.

"I know that you have something in your mind, dear Juliana," said Constance, pursuing the strain into which the discourse had gradually glided, "and though I have noticed it for some few months past, and have often been going to question you on the subject, yet I did not like to do so."

"And why not?" asked Juliana, the rich blood mantling upon her cheeks. "Do you think that I should have refused you my confidence? No, I should have been pleased if you had sought it. But it involves a secret which I could not bring myself to confess of my own accord. It is

a revelation which one shrinks from making willingly, and which must be asked for before it can be breathed even in the ears of a sister."

"I have not questioned you before, Juliana," was the reply given by Constance, "because you are sometimes so impetuous and hasty — "

"Ah! but in this respect I should not have been so," interrupted the elder sister. "And besides, you have a perfect right to seek my fullest confidence. Have you not given me your own? Am I not acquainted with the secret of your love? "

"Oh, then," exclaimed the blushing Constance, "I am to understand that the confession you are now about to make is of the same tender character. I am glad of it — I am delighted at the idea that you yourself also cherish an affection of the heart, for I have sometimes felt uneasy — I know not why — at the thought of being alone as it were — "

"In experiencing the bliss of love? " added Juliana, with an arch smile upon her lip, but still with a blush upon her cheeks. Then, as her fine bust heaved with a profound sigh, she added, in a low and almost mournful voice, "I am afraid, Constance, that we can scarcely congratulate each other upon the objects in whom our affections are respectively centred."

"What! " exclaimed Constance, "do you mean to share my mother's prejudice against Villebelle? Ah! this has been the source of my uneasiness, when I have reflected that I loved so fondly, and that you, being ignorant of what love is, could not enter into the spirit of all I experience, and would thus sooner or later be led to view this love of mine with suspicion and displeasure."

"But I hope, my dear Constance, that you have never feared I should betray you? " said Juliana, with a reproachful look.

"Oh, betray me, no! I was well aware that you were incapable of such perfidy toward me. But I trembled lest you, dear Juliana, sharing none of my enthusiasm in respect to the Marquis of Villebelle, might endeavour to wean me from that devoted love with which I regard him, might remonstrate against the impropriety of our clandestine meetings, and might even be cold to him when you were present at our interviews. All this have I apprehended — "

"But have your fears been realized?" interrupted Juliana. "On the contrary, have I not assisted you in those meetings? Have I not even kept watch when the marquis, stealthily entering the garden, has encountered you there? Was it not I who enlisted our maid Mary Anne in your interest, and induced her to become the bearer of your notes?"

"Yes, all this is true, dearest Juliana, and I was wrong ever to entertain the slightest misgiving in respect to your kindness. But now tell me," continued Constance, "who is the object of this love which your heart cherishes? For that you do love, your lips have admitted, yes, and your looks have confirmed the avowal."

"No, no, Constance, I cannot tell you," murmured Juliana. "I am fearful that you will ridicule — you will despise me."

"Impossible, dearest sister," said Constance. "For all the reasons that you yourself have just given when enumerating the services you have rendered me, am I bound not merely to pay your feelings as much respect as I claim for my own, but likewise to give you such succour as may lie in my power?"

"But in this case there are no such aids requisite," responded Juliana, evidently approaching with reluctance the full revelation of her secret, and therefore gradually preparing her sister for the final avowal by means of hints and allusions. "In my case, Constance, there need be no interchange of letters, no clandestine meetings in the garden, no scaling of the walls, no posting some one to keep watch, no entrusting the secret to a maid — "

"I cannot understand you," observed Constance, gazing upon her sister with surprise and bewilderment. "If all these accessories and aids are not required, it must be because the object of your love would not be distasteful to our mother, our relatives, and our friends."

"Here again you are wrong, Constance," interrupted Juliana. "Listen. When our mother first perceived, a few months ago, that the Marquis of Villebelle began to pay you some attention and that you appeared pleased with his courtesies and his assiduities, she purposely insulted him, though in her own dignified and coldly serene manner, and this was done deliberately in order to convince him

that his suit for your hand would never receive a sanction from her lips. The result of that insult was that the marquis found himself compelled to abstain from visiting at the house. But still our mother was not satisfied with having thus excluded him from the mansion. She sought to poison your mind against him, so as effectually to raise up a barrier between yourselves. This she did, not pointedly as if she really believed you loved him, but by innuendo and casual remark, always in your presence, but not as if her words were expressly spoken for you, and for you alone. She could not deny that he was really what he represented himself, that he was well connected, and that he belonged to one of the oldest families in France, but she gave you to understand that he was a man of broken fortunes, that the sources of his income, poor as it must be, were not ostensible, and that it was even rumoured he had been already married to an English lady, and that his wife was still alive. These and a thousand other things did our mother from time to time let drop, in order to set you against your beloved Etienne de Villebelle."

" But why, my dear Juliana," asked Constance, " recapitulate all these things? Why remind me of circumstances which at the time troubled me much? And what possible connection is there between all this and the revelation which I am awaiting from your lips? "

" I asked you to listen patiently, my dear sister," rejoined Juliana, speaking with the seriousness of one who had not lost the thread of the discourse in any confusion of ideas, but was following it up in her own way and in order to lead her listener on by her own specific path to the point which must be ultimately reached. " What I intended by all those recapitulations was to remind you of the pains and the trouble which our mother has taken in order to set you against the Marquis of Villebelle; and she only desisted from constantly bringing up his name in a disparaging manner when I counselled you to practise a dissimulation that should lead her to believe her words had made the desired impression upon your mind and that your opinion had been altogether altered in respect to him. Well, but as I was saying, you see the immense trouble Lady Saxondale took to set you as she thought against the object of your affections, and had she not been led to believe that

she had succeeded, she would have toiled on unweariedly toward the same end, perhaps, indeed, until she had succeeded in accomplishing it."

"No, no, that were impossible," exclaimed Constance, with fervour, "for you know how tenderly and sincerely I love my Etienne, and how worthy he is of my affection, despite our mother's disparaging reports. But your own secret, Juliana — "

"I am coming to that point," answered the young lady. "Ere now you conjectured that the object of this love of mine is one whom I need not be ashamed to acknowledge, and who would be acceptable to our mother, our relations, and our friends. Ah! my dear Constance, great as the prejudice of them all at first was against the Marquis of Villebelle, great as it still would be if they knew that your love continues for him, yet would they welcome him into the family as your husband with exultation and enthusiasm, in comparison with the feeling with which they would regard the individual in whom my affections are centred."

"Juliana, you alarm me," said Constance. "Is it possible that you love some one who is unworthy of you? "

"Ah! that is a phrase liable to many different constructions," responded Juliana. "So long as the object of a lady's love be an honourable, correct, and upright person, who shall dare pronounce him unworthy of that love? But if in addition to being honourable and virtuous and good, he is likewise gloriously handsome, — a very Adonis, one of nature's sublimest aristocracy so far as personal beauty is concerned, — again, I ask, who shall dare to scorn him as unworthy the love of a patrician damsel? Yet nearly all the world would do this. And why? Not so much because he is without fortune, not so much, perhaps, because he is of humble, or what is worse, unknown parentage, but because he is in a menial capacity — because," added Juliana, tremulously and hesitatingly, "he wears that garb which is the badge of servitude."

"Good heavens! " exclaimed Constance, a gleam of the real truth suddenly flashing in upon her mind, "is it possible — "

"Oh, I have said too much — I have said too much already," exclaimed Juliana, with bitterness of voice and an almost anguished curling of the lip. "Constance, had

your Marquis of Villebelle been the veriest menial that ever stooped to lower the steps of a proud patrician's carriage, I should not have taught you to scorn and despise him, much less have scorned and despised him myself."

"Forgive me, dear sister, forgive me, if I have wounded your feelings," said Constance, bursting into tears. "It was unintentional, it was rather in surprise than through any other impulse, and as to studied motive, I had none. Forgive me, I say," and she threw her arms around her sister's neck.

"Yes, I forgive you, dear Constance," responded Juliana, who in her heart was glad that this little scene had taken place, inasmuch as it had disarmed her sister as it were of the strength of those feelings which she knew from the first must inevitably be excited by the mention of that name which had not as yet passed her lips. "And now, since you have guessed who the object of my love is — "

"Yes, it is Frank — Francis Paton," whispered Constance in her sister's ear.

"It is," responded Juliana, and still further to hush any scruples which her sister might have at listening to such a revelation or admitting the propriety of such an attachment, she at once assumed a proud position, exclaiming, "Yes, it is he, our young page, at present a mere menial in the family. But so enthusiastic is my love, that I could almost glory in it."

Constance did not immediately make any comment, but unwinding her arms from her sister's neck, she slid back to her seat, and could not prevent herself from falling into a profound and serious train of reflections.

"You have given your love, Constance, to the Marquis of Villebelle," said Juliana, after a long pause, "and if circumstances do not sooner or later turn up favourably in your behalf, I presume you will marry him in spite of mother, brother, relatives, and friends. In doing this, you will be right, because you will be consulting your own happiness. I have told you so all along. But wherefore should you on the one hand consult your happiness, and I sacrifice mine on the other? Much as you love your Etienne, do I love my Francis."

"Then Heaven forbid that I should venture to breathe a word against this love of yours!" interrupted Constance,

speaking frankly and ingenuously. "But does Francis know that you love him? Have you told him so?"

"Not in words — not in words," responded Juliana, "but in looks, by the eyes, and by the thousand and one little signs and evidences in which love even unwillingly and unconsciously betrays itself. Do not think, Constance, that all on a sudden I abandoned myself to this passion; do not imagine that the moment I felt its influence I gave it free rein and permitted it to bear me away like a courser that I could stop if I chose, but would not. No, I can assure you, my dear girl, that I wrestled against it. I struggled, and being then deeply imbued with the prejudices in which I had been reared, I also felt humiliated in my own eyes. My pride was hurt, my dignity was offended, I felt indeed as if I were touching upon the threshold of a crime. But the power of love has risen triumphant above all such false notions and wretched artificialities. When I have surveyed that beautiful youth, I have felt — oh, I have felt — that there is no sacrifice I could not accomplish for his sake. Think of all the young noblemen and gentlemen who frequent our saloons, Constance, and tell me one whose voice possesses a sweeter music than that of Francis Paton. Think of them all again, scan them one by one, pass them in review through your mind, and tell me if your thoughts can settle upon any individual amongst them whose countenance is endowed with so sublime and intelligent a beauty. As for gentility, is he not exquisitely genteel, even in that menial garb which he wears? Does it not become him as well as the scarlet uniform upon the tightly laced figure of the young military fop? Strip him of that menial garb, let him be apparelled in the plain but fashionable clothes of a gentleman, and what evidence of his plebeian origin will remain? Besides, after all, who knows that his origin is plebeian at all? For I believe, from what I have heard, it is involved in much obscurity. He was at first a page at court, but was suddenly removed, he himself scarcely knows why, and it was Lord Petersfield who recommended him to our mother. To a certain extent there is a sort of mystery hanging over him, — a mystery which first attracted my interest, inspired me with sympathy, and led me on to love."

"And Heaven grant, my dear sister," replied Constance,

deeply moved by Juliana's speech, "that you may prove happy in this love of yours. But you say that as yet you have not in words revealed it to Frank Paton? Think you that he is aware that you love him?"

"I am sure of it," responded Juliana, with impassioned warmth; "and I am equally confident that he loves me in return. But he is timid and bashful, and also retiring, more perhaps from a due sense of his position than naturally so, and never from his lips dare I hope for the first avowal. But from mine — yes, from mine — shall he receive that avowal of love which I know and feel to be reciprocal. Often and often, during the last few weeks, has such an avowal trembled upon my tongue, when for a few minutes I have found myself alone with him, and yet I have not had the courage to let it go forth. But the next opportunity —"

At this moment the door opened, and Mary Anne, the principal lady's-maid especially devoted to the service of the two sisters, entered the room. The quick glance which she flung around to assure herself that they were alone, and the expression of mingled archness and importance which was upon her very handsome countenance, at once revealed the object of her coming.

"He is here?" said Constance, springing from her seat and bounding toward the lady's-maid.

"No, miss, but this letter has just arrived," and Mary Anne drew forth from the bosom of her dress a little billet which she handed to her young mistress.

"He will be here at four o'clock," exclaimed Constance, her beautiful countenance becoming radiant with joy as she glanced over the contents of the letter. "Mary Anne, you must be upon the lookout at the side door as usual."

"Trust me, miss," replied the abigail, proud of being the confidante of this important secret. "I will take care everything goes well. Her ladyship will not be home till five; she told her own maid so."

Mary Anne then retired, and Constance, looking at the timepiece, exclaimed, "It is half-past three o'clock. I must go up and dress. And you, Juliana —"

"I do not feel in the humour for exertion at present," answered the elder sister. "I will go up presently. But rest assured, my dear Constance, that while the marquis

is with you in the garden I will keep watch as well as the faithful Mary Anne."

Constance thanked her sister, and hurried out of the room. Five minutes afterward the door again opened, and this time it was to give admittance to Francis Paton, who carried in his hand a massive silver salver, upon which there was a periodical of court news and fashionable intelligence, to which the young ladies regularly subscribed.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LADY AND THE PAGE

A SUDDEN glow of fervid delight thrilled through the entire form of the Honourable Miss Juliana Farefield, as her magnificent dark eyes settled upon the beautiful countenance and symmetrical figure of Francis Paton. The blood mantled upon her cheeks, and her bosom heaved with a long sigh of pleasure as he approached.

We have already said, when describing this exceedingly fascinating youth, that he had but little colour upon his cheeks; indeed his countenance was somewhat pale, not with a dull pallor of ill health, but with that animated paleness which is characteristic of a high order of intellectuality. Nevertheless, the little colour that there was on Frank's cheeks rapidly deepened as he beheld the regards of the young lady fixed upon him with an expression at once burning and tender. Nor less did he experience a kindred sensation of ecstatic feeling, as if catching the transfusion of the fervid passion which inspired Juliana's heart.

With tremulous fingers did the patrician lady take the publication off the silver tray, and as she did so, her own fair hand was lightly and intentionally swept over that with which the page was holding the salver. Her eyes were all the time upturned toward him, with an expression of glowing tenderness which he could not mistake, and the spirit of which it was impossible to avoid catching. Moreover, that touch had galvanized him. It had sent its electric influence throughout his entire form, — an influence as potent as the magnetic source from whence it had emanated. The salver actually vibrated in his tremulous hand, and suddenly seized with confusion, he was turning away, when

Juliana said, as if with the effort of a resolution, " Stop, Frank, I wish to speak to you."

" Yes, miss," murmured the youth, and with eyes now bent down, and trembling all over, he remained standing close by the luxurious seat where Miss Farefield's magnificent form was supported by flocculent cushions.

" Frank," she said, " why do you tremble so? Why do you look confused — half-frightened? Surely you can guess what I am going to say to you? But I myself am now so confused, and yet this is foolish. Frank," she exclaimed, suddenly raising herself from her indolently lounging posture, and bending upon the almost stupefied youth the entire power of her glorious dark eyes, " I love you — I love you."

" Heavens, miss, what do you mean? What — what — " and the amazed and bewildered Francis stood blushing and trembling, covered with confusion, in the presence of that superb young woman of high patrician birth who had just with the effort of a strong resolution thrown at him the avowal of her love.

" What do I mean, dear boy? " she answered, with glowing cheeks and with a delicious languor floating in the depths of her eyes. " I mean that I can conceal this secret no longer — that I love you — Oh, I love you, with an affection so sincere, a passion so strong, that if you were the son of a duke instead of what you are, it could not be more powerful! Tell me then, Francis, can you love me in return? Do you love me already? Yes, yes, I see that you do — I know it — I read it in your eyes — O Heaven! it is a paradise to love and be beloved," and as she thus spoke the impassioned young lady snatched the youth's disengaged hand and pressed it with a warmth — nay, almost a frenzied violence — which testified unmistakably to the ardour of her feelings.

" Oh, miss, what would her ladyship say if she knew this? " exclaimed Francis, more confused than ever.

" She need not know it, my dear boy," returned Juliana. " But tell me, tell me, do you love me? Do you like me? "

" Yes, I love you," he answered, timidly, while his cheeks were crimson.

" Oh, and I love you also, full well do I love you," and the impassioned young lady threw her arms around his neck and kissed him tenderly. " Now do not go away yet, but

stop and talk to me a little," she continued, throwing herself back in the chair, but retaining one of his hands clasped in both her own. " Have you any relations or friends to be kind and good to you, Frank? "

" I have a sister, but for some time past I have heard nothing of her," said the youth, mournfully.

" And this sister, is she older or younger than yourself? " asked Juliana.

" Oh, she is several years older than I," responded the young page.

" And your parents? " said Juliana, inquiringly. " I heard Lord Petersfield one day mentioning to my mother that you never knew them — "

" And that is so far true, miss," replied Francis, " that even amongst my earliest recollections I can settle my thoughts upon none whom I called either father or mother. And yet there is in my mind the deep conviction that I have more than once seen my mother, though I called her not by that name, nor did she address me as her son."

" Tell me, my dear Frank, all that you remember in respect to the circumstances of your past life, for if you do not already perceive it, I must assure you that I am deeply, deeply interested in everything that concerns you," and Juliana gazed with tenderness upon him.

" The earliest reminiscences I have," resumed the young page, " are connected with a pretty little cottage at no great distance from London, but in what part I cannot recollect, and there I and my sister lived with a kind old lady whom we called grandmamma. My sister, who is seven or eight years older than myself, did not then go to school, but was taught the elements of instruction by Mrs. Burnaby, for that was the old lady's name. I remember one day when I was six years old that I and my sister were taken by Mrs. Burnaby in a hired carriage to some considerable distance from home. We stopped at a little village where another carriage was waiting for us, and this second carriage had a coachman with a powdered wig, and a tall footman with a long gold-headed cane in his hand. Both these domestics were dressed in handsome liveries, and the equipage itself was a very fine one. It bore us to a large and splendid-looking house in the middle of an immense park.

" On arriving at this house, Mrs. Burnaby conducted me

and my sister up-stairs to a room where a lady was lying in bed. Two other ladies were seated by the side of the couch, and they spoke very kindly to me and my sister. They then quitted the room, and the moment they were gone, the lady who was in bed took us, kissed us a good deal, and cried very much. She was pale and ill, but so beautiful. We stayed with her some little time. I did not then calculate how long, — I was too young for that, — but as far as I have since been able to remember, I should think at least an hour. During that interval the lady treated us very kindly, made me sit upon the bed, and played with my hair, patted my face, kissed me, and, in short, lavished upon me the tenderest endearments. She showed an equal affection toward my sister, and when Mrs. Burnaby was about to take us away again, the lady cried so bitterly that I remember both I and my sister cried also. The handsome carriage bore us back to the same spot where it had received us, and there we changed into the hired vehicle which had brought us thither in the earlier part of the day, and which now took us home again. The following week my sister was sent to a boarding-school on the seacoast, but I remained with Mrs. Burnaby.

" A year after the mysterious visit to the invalid lady, Mrs. Burnaby one evening took me into London in a hackney-coach, and I remember that it stopped at a place which seemed to me at the time like an old church, for it had a tower with an immense clock-face upon it. We entered this building, and as we ascended the stairs Mrs. Burnaby told me in a whisper that I was going to see the same lady whom I had visited in the country a year before. I was pleased, for I loved that lady on account of her affectionate kindness toward me, and because I felt it was sweet to love and think of her. I recollect a gentleman, dressed in black and with a star on his breast, coming out of a room and speaking for some time in a whisper to Mrs. Burnaby, so that I did not hear what they said. When their conversation was done, the gentleman led us along a passage into a magnificent room, where he left us. There were a great many pictures in that room, some representing male portraits with crowns on their heads and sceptres in their hands, and having seen little wood-engravings of similar portraits in the ' History of England ' out of which I learned, I asked Mrs. Burnaby

if those were not likenesses of the same kings that were depicted in the book. But before she gave me any answer the door opened, and that lady whom I had seen at the mansion in the country made her appearance. She shook hands with Mrs. Burnaby, and, catching me up in her arms, covered me with kisses. She was beautifully dressed, and looked much better than when I had seen her lying in bed. Then she was sick and ill, and very pale, now she had a fine colour on her cheeks. I recollect perfectly well asking her whether she was my mamma. But instead of answering me, she pressed me again to her bosom, and her tears moistened my cheeks. On this occasion I was not more than half an hour with her, and as Mrs. Burnaby took me again away, we met in the passage that same gentleman whom I had previously seen and who had the star on his breast."

"All this is very singular, my dear Frank," said Juliana, who listened with a deepening interest to the youth's recital. "Proceed: I am dying to hear the rest."

"About ten months after the incident I have just related," resumed the young page, "poor Mrs. Burnaby met with a severe accident through a fall, and after a short illness she died. I wept very much, for I loved her dearly, but the servant-woman told me that Mrs. Burnaby was not my grandmamma at all, and indeed no relation. I remember that the young woman looked very sly and knowing as she told me this, and bade me not mention what she had said to anybody who might come to the cottage to superintend the funeral. I thought it very strange, and put some questions to the servant which were naturally suggested even to my young and inexperienced mind, but she would tell me nothing more, or perhaps she knew no more to tell. The day after Mrs. Burnaby's death that gentleman whom I had seen with a star upon his breast came to the cottage; and the first thing he did was to open the deceased lady's desk, take out all her papers, and examine them. Some he burned, others he put in his pocket, for I was in the room the whole time. I stayed in the house till after the funeral, which I remember was very plainly and privately conducted, and then the gentleman of whom I have spoken came and took me away with him in a carriage.

"We proceeded straight to that same mansion in the country where I had seen the lady for the first time, and

there I was again conducted into her presence. She was seated in a splendidly furnished apartment, with those two other ladies who were by her bedside on the former occasion, and these two ladies, having caressed me, quitted the room with the gentleman, leaving me alone with the lady. I was then eight years old. She asked me if I recollected her, and when I replied in the affirmative, she inquired if I had ever thought of her since I had seen her last. I assured her that I had often and often thought of her, that I had cried at night when remembering how she had wept over me, and that I had often dreamed I saw her bending over my couch and looking kindly upon me. Oh, how fast her tears fell as I told her these things, and she was such a beautiful lady! I loved her so, and I felt so happy when she strained me in her arms and embraced me. On this occasion she kept me with her for several hours, and it was evening when the gentleman of whom I have spoken came to fetch me away. The lady appeared almost frantic at parting from me, and I recollect that she exclaimed more than once, 'Poor boy! perhaps I shall never see thee again.' I cried very bitterly, for I felt that I should have liked to live with that lady altogether. She cut off a lock of my hair, and then, having embraced me again and again, consigned me back to the care of the gentleman of whom I have spoken. The carriage was in readiness at a side door, and as I was whirled away from that mansion, I felt so truly unhappy that my young heart seemed as if it would break.

"The gentleman said little to console me, for although he was not exactly cross, yet he was reserved and distant. We travelled for a few hours, and at length stopped at a hotel in some town, where we passed the night. On the following morning our journey was resumed in the carriage, with post-horses, and in the middle of the day we reached Southampton. It was here that my sister was at school, and I was to be placed at the same establishment. But here I should explain that this academy was kept by a gentleman and his wife, who divided it into two branches. The former conducting a boys' seminary, and the latter a school for young ladies, they having two large houses which adjoined each other. It was in the male department of the academy that I was placed. My sister, who was now sixteen, and whom I had not seen for two years, had grown wondrously.

She was a fine tall girl, and looked indeed like a young woman. She had not previously been informed of Mrs. Burnaby's death, and when she now learned it, she was much afflicted."

"Had your sister hitherto believed that the good old lady was a near relative?" inquired Juliana.

"Yes," returned Francis, "and she was much amazed when I told her what the servant-woman had said to me upon the subject. At that school my sister remained for four years longer, and therefore till she was twenty; but during the latter portion of the time she was there as a teacher or assistant, for which she was paid a regular salary. At the expiration of that period she was told by the schoolmistress that a situation had been found for her as governess in a family about to visit the Continent, and with many tears were we thus compelled to separate. I remained at the academy until I was sixteen, passing all the holidays there, and never being visited by a single soul in the shape of relation or friend. So I suppose that I had no relatives save my sister, and no friends in the world."

"Poor Frank!" murmured Juliana, as the youth's voice sounded low and plaintive to her ears. "But were you well treated during the time?"

"With that negative sort of kindness which is no kindness at all," he answered. "That is to say, I was not ill-treated. I had enough to eat and drink, and an allowance of pocket-money. I was also well clothed, and thus far wanted for nothing. But no kind word was ever spoken to me, no endeavour was made to solace my young heart in the dreary monotony of the life which I led. Well, the eight years passed away, and when I reached the age of sixteen, I was one morning told by the schoolmaster that I was no longer to remain under his care, but was to proceed to London. I asked him what were the future intentions of those invisible persons who appeared to have the control of my destiny, but he was either really ignorant upon the subject, or else had his own private motives for refusing to give me any information thereon. He wrote upon a piece of paper the name of a hotel where I was to stop on my arrival in London, and giving me money for my journey, he bade me farewell.

"It was eight o'clock in the evening when I reached the

metropolis; and it was at Hatchett's Hotel in Piccadilly where, according to the instructions given, I took up my quarters. On the following morning, just as I had concluded my breakfast, I received a letter which had been left for me, and which came from a clerk in the lord steward's office at Buckingham Palace. This letter informed me that the situation of page of the back stairs in the royal household was at my service. I was delighted. There seemed to be something grand in being one of the queen's pages; and methought it would furnish the stepping-stone to a career in which I should be enabled by zeal and good conduct to push my way to higher posts, perhaps to eminence. With a beating heart and exultant spirits did I repair to the palace, but scarcely had I entered upon the duties of my situation, when I found that they were entirely of a menial character. I had hoped to become a gentleman page, but I found myself cruelly disappointed. Yet, what could I do? My means of existence depended upon an absolute resignation to my lot, for if I threw up my post, to whom could I apply for employment? I therefore made up my mind to fulfil my destiny with as much cheerfulness as possible; but as I lay awake at nights I could not help asking myself many questions, and suffering my imagination to wander in a bewildering maze of conjectures. Why had I been brought up genteelly, if only intended for a menial office? Wherefore had I been educated with young gentlemen at a boarding-school and taught to believe myself a gentleman also, if no brighter lot than that of a lackey were in reserve for me? How was it that having in my earliest youth been fondled and caressed by an elegant lady, the influence of her love, even though following me unperceived, had not saved me from such a degradation as this? These and a thousand other questions did I ask myself, but no solution could I possibly find for them.

"Various circumstances, however, gradually transpired to make me acquainted with new and still more bewildering facts associated with my earlier years. On the very first occasion, after my installation at Buckingham Palace, that I had an opportunity of walking out to view the metropolis, I chanced to pass down St. James's Street, and the moment I caught a glimpse of the old red brick building at the bottom, I recognized it. Yes, though nine years had elapsed

since I first beheld that old tower with the huge clock-face, I had never forgotten it. Still ignorant of what the building was, I inquired of a passer-by; he told me it was St. James's Palace, and then hurriedly continued his way, thinking that mine was the mere question of curiosity put by a stranger in London. But he left me there, nailed to the spot with astonishment. St. James's Palace! Was that lady who had embraced me so tenderly, who had wept over me, and who did not answer me when I asked if she were my mother, was she a dweller in that palace? If so, must she not be connected with the court? And in my present position was it not probable that I should sooner or later fall in with her? Oh, but if she were dead? I burst into tears at the thought, and perceiving that I had already become the object of attention on the part of several persons in the street, I rushed rapidly on. In order to convince myself that I was not mistaken in respect to the identity of St. James's Palace with that building to which Mrs. Burnaby had conducted me to see the beautiful lady whose tearful countenance was always uppermost in my mind, I approached the edifice and examined its exterior narrowly. Yes, it was the same; there could be no doubt of it. And it was in that palace, therefore, that on one occasion I had seen her whom I believed to be my mother."

Francis Paton again paused through deeply stirred emotions, and Juliana, making him bend down toward her, lavished tender caresses upon his exquisitely handsome countenance. She then besought him to proceed, and he continued his narrative in the following manner:

"A few weeks after the incident I have just mentioned, her Majesty the Queen held a levee at St. James's Palace. My duties called me thither, and I inwardly hoped that I should have an opportunity of still further confirming my belief that it was indeed there I had seen the lady of my story. Nor was I disappointed. I recognized the very corridor in which Mrs. Burnaby had stopped to carry on her whispered conversation with the gentleman having the star upon his breast, or, rather, the nobleman, for such, since my acquaintance with courtly usages, I had found he must be, the star being the emblem of his aristocratic rank. And the room where I had seen the lady? Yes, I had no trouble in recognizing that also, for there were the portraits of the Kings of England, with the crowns upon their heads and the

sceptres in their hands. As I stood in that room surveying those and all other familiar objects, what a gush of memories swept through my brain! What a tide of emotions surged up in my breast! Methought that I still beheld that lady, with her beautiful countenance all bedewed in tears, seated on the sofa where I had once seen her, and where too I had sat upon her knees and been strained to her bosom, and for a few minutes I was blinded with my weeping. Oh, if she were my mother? Why, why was I unacknowledged, and my sister also? Was it that we were the children of shame? Alas, alas, poor mother!"

Again did Francis Paton pause, well-nigh overcome by his emotions, and Juliana, deeply touched by his tale, lavished upon him the tenderest caresses. She spoke soothingly to him; she said all she could think of to break down the artificial barrier which separated them and make him feel himself upon an equal and familiar footing. The youth saw and appreciated these evidences of love on her part, and was profoundly moved thereby; so that it was with a tone and manner of greater confidence that he thus resumed his narrative:

"If any doubt had previously existed in my mind in respect to St. James's Palace being the place where I had seen that lady whom I always think of as my mother, it was now cleared up. But who was she? Who could she have been? Some one of no mean rank, for on two occasions had I seen elegantly dressed ladies with her, apparently in attendance upon her, and treating her with deference and respect. Moreover, that nobleman with a star upon his breast, was he not in some way closely connected with that lady or with her secret? For that there was a secret, and that this mystery regarded my sister and myself, it was impossible to doubt. However, I will not dwell upon all the ideas which suggested themselves, all the conjectures that I formed, because they led to nothing. Let me continue my narrative. Weeks and months passed away, and never amidst the crowd of titled dames who visited at the palace did I catch a glimpse of that one countenance which above all others I would have given worlds to behold."

"And should you recollect it now, if you beheld that countenance, Frank?" inquired Juliana, more and more interested in the youth's strange and romantic story.

"Recollect it, miss?" he exclaimed. "Oh, it were impossible to forget it! Even if I had never seen that lady but once, — and even if it were only on that first occasion when I was but six years old, — her image would have remained indelibly impressed upon my mind. But recollect, Miss Farefield, that on two subsequent occasions did I behold that lady at about a year's interval each time, and that on the last occasion I was eight years old. At this age the mind is callous and insensible to many things, but equally susceptible and sensitive in other things. Amidst the Alpine forests there is a tree which if, when a tender sapling, a name be engraved upon it, will, as it grows with the progress of years, retain the inscription thus made; and while increasing in bulk and height, it still preserves the name indented upon its rind, and the larger it becomes the deeper, the wider, and the more palpable grows the inscription also. So it is with certain images which are engraven upon the youthful heart. The human sapling grows up to man's estate, and time, instead of obliterating the inscription, deepens it, makes it spread over a wider space of the heart, and allows it not to be effaced."

"Frank," murmured Juliana, gazing upon the youth in mingled astonishment and adoration, "it is something ineffably sweet, though mournful and touching, to hear you talk thus. Oh, if my image could only be imprinted thus indelibly upon your heart, how happy should I be. But ere now you addressed me as Miss Farefield. When we are alone together, let there henceforth be no ceremony between us. Away, away," cried the impassioned young lady, "with all cold formalities. To me you are Frank, and to you I am Juliana."

The youth, who in his inexperience of the human heart mistook this gush of impassioned feelings for the purest and chastest love, a mistake which Juliana herself also made in respect to her own emotions, was enraptured by the language, the looks, and the caresses of that splendid patrician lady; and amidst all the mournful reminiscences which the recital of his history had conjured up, he felt soothed and consoled by her kind words and her tender sympathy, so that bending down as he stood by her chair, he kissed her unasked. She embraced him with glowing ardour, and after this interchange of caresses, he resumed his narrative.

" I have already said that weeks and months passed away, and gradually the hope of meeting that lady whom I so much longed to see died within me. At length I was one day startled by encountering in the great hall of Buckingham Palace that nobleman whom I have so often mentioned in my narrative, — the one whom I saw first with a star upon his breast, and who had subsequently placed me at the boarding-school at Southampton. Though nine years had elapsed since last I beheld him, and though he looked very much older, and was even much altered, yet was I convinced that it was he. Obeying a natural impulse, I hastened forward and presented myself before him. ' My lord,' I said, without then knowing his name, but merely being aware of his rank, ' I am Francis Paton! ' Conceive my astonishment when, surveying me with cold and inscrutable look, he answered, ' Well, my lad, and who is Francis Paton? ' I said that I was astonished, I might have added that I was astounded, dismayed, and for the instant it really struck me that I must have made a mistake. But another and still more scrutinizing survey of that nobleman convinced me that I had not. I would have staked my soul upon the issue, could the matter have been put to the test. ' My lord,' I exclaimed, with an indignation which I could not control, ' I am that Francis Paton whom you took from the cottage where Mrs. Burnaby died to a mansion in the country where I saw a lady whom I had seen before and whom I would give worlds to see again. I am he also whom your lordship placed at a seminary in Southampton, and I am much mistaken if it be not also to your lordship that I am indebted for the bread of servitude which I now eat.' "

" You spoke with spirit, Frank," observed Juliana.

" The last portion of my speech was uttered with bitterness and reproach," exclaimed the youth. " But it was without effect. The nobleman continued cold, unmoved, inscrutable. If he displayed any emotion at all, it was an affectation of surprise, as he said, ' Young man, you are talking in enigmas. I know nothing of the incidents to which you allude, and they are evidently secrets into which I have no right to pry. But as you have made such a mistake without sinister design, I will not chide. On the contrary, I am rather inclined to take an interest in you, and therefore if ever you need a friend, do not hesitate to apply to me.'

'Oh, my lord,' I exclaimed, 'torture me not with this assumed ignorance of the past, but tell me who and where is the lady that I long to claim as my mother!' 'Young man,' responded the nobleman, 'it is useless for you to address me in this manner. Let it be sufficient for you that the romantic singularity of the present occurrence which has led you to mistake me for another has so far enlisted my sympathy that I will prove your friend.' He then passed rapidly on through the hall, but ere he issued forth from the palace, I inquired of a fellow page who made his appearance there at the moment, who that nobleman was. 'Lord Petersfield,' was the answer."

"Lord Petersfield! my father's trustee, my brother's guardian, my mother's intimate friend," exclaimed Juliana. "But I ought to have suspected as much, knowing that it was he who recommended you to Lady Saxondale. Proceed, dear Frank, proceed."

"That Lord Petersfield was he whom I had seen in my earlier years, I felt convinced," resumed the youth, "notwithstanding his denial. Wherefore should he have proffered me his interest — he even used the word friendship — unless I had that claim upon him? But what connection was there between him and the lady whom I regarded as my mother? Was he a relation or merely a friend? Vain queries were these that I put to myself, and how futile were all the conjectures they raised up. But without dwelling at too great a length on this part of my narrative, let me hasten on to relate another incident.

"A few weeks after I had thus encountered Lord Petersfield, her Majesty the Queen gave a concert at Buckingham Palace. A thousand cards of invitation were issued, and at the appointed hour the vicinage of the royal dwelling was crowded with brilliant equipages. My duty on the occasion placed me in a kind of antechamber through which the company had to pass to the Yellow Drawing-room, where the guests were first to assemble ere the concert-room was thrown open. For some time there was a continuous flow of all the élite of rank and fashion, but for a brief interval there was a pause — a lapse, so to speak — in the living stream, and thus two or three minutes passed ere any fresh arrivals made their appearance. At length I heard footsteps approaching, light, airy steps, and the rustling of dresses. The next

moment two ladies, whose ages might respectively have been thirty-two and thirty (but they were not sisters, at least to judge from their looks), entered the antechamber on their way to the state apartments. Ah, those faces! I recollected them in a moment. They were the same I had seen by the couch of the lady at the country mansion, the same I had subsequently seen, also, at that mansion, on the last occasion of my being conducted thither. For observe, Miss Farefield, — Juliana, I mean, dear Juliana, — observe, I say, that my memory has not only been vividly keen and scrupulously faithful relative to all incidents associated with the mysteries of my earlier years, but will remain immortal in that respect. Be not surprised, therefore, if I at once knew those ladies. Though years had passed over their heads, yet in their passage they had merely developed and perhaps heightened, but by no means marred and little changed, the mingled sweetness and glory of their charms.

"Obedient to that same impulse which had urged me to address Lord Petersfield, I sprang forward and threw myself pointedly, but not rudely, in their way. 'What is it?' they both asked in a breath, and at that moment I can well believe they recollected me not. 'I am Francis Paton,' I said, and then I exclaimed, 'Oh, you recognize me! you know me now,' for I saw that they both started and then exchanged looks of mingled uneasiness and surprise. But instantaneously recovering themselves, and as if in pursuance of the same tacitly understood resolve how to act, they said, coldly, 'There is some mistake,' and passed on. I fell back confounded, and sank overpowered on a seat. Then I burst into tears, for the conviction struck to my soul that all those who could tell me anything of my mother were inspired by the terrible determination to ignore my claims upon their sympathy and their confidence. The approach of fresh arrivals recalled me to myself; I dashed away the tears from my eyes, and, rising from the seat, resumed my post at the door of the antechamber. Then, as I regained my composure, — or at least was able to collect my ideas, — I resolved to watch those two ladies when they came forth again, ascertain who they were, and thus endeavour by making inquiries concerning them, to follow up the clue, if any were thus afforded, in the hope of reaching the desired aim and discovering who that lady was that had left her image so indelibly impressed

on my soul. But in this design I was disappointed. When the concert broke up, some portion of the visitors took their departure by one avenue of egress and some portion by another, and thus I missed the two ladies whom I so anxiously sought. From that day forth I have never again seen them."

"Did they not visit the palace again?" asked Juliana.

"I cannot say," replied Francis, "for within a week I was somewhat summarily informed that my further services would be dispensed with, inasmuch as some reduction was to be made in certain departments of the royal household, and that the juniors in each were to be first dismissed. I was however assured that so far from any fault being found with me, I had given the utmost satisfaction, and as a proof thereof three months' salary was paid and the best testimonials presented to me. I could not help thinking that the true cause had not been assigned for my dismissal. A secret voice appeared to whisper within me to the effect that it was found inconvenient, and perhaps dangerous, in certain quarters to stand the chance of being accosted or importuned by me when visiting the palace. However, the day came for me to leave, and I departed accordingly."

"Then, no doubt you remembered Lord Petersfield's promise?" said Juliana, inquiringly.

"Yes, but it was far less with the idea of seeking his aid in procuring another situation than to have an opportunity of pleading my cause before him once more, that I sought him at his mansion. The moment I sent up my name his lordship received me, and received me too with kindness; that is to say, with as much kindness as it is in his nature to show. I told him of my dismissal from the palace, at which he appeared to be surprised, though in my own mind I had the intuitive conviction that this surprise was merely feigned on his part. I threw myself at his feet, beseeching and imploring that he would say but one word to lift the veil which enveloped the past in so much mystery, but he was immovable. He pretended to pity me, and affected to believe that I must be labouring under some monomaniac idea. In short, I could obtain nothing from him in the shape of revelation. He spoke kindly to me, as I ere now said, and observed that he could at once help me to another situation, as he happened to be aware at the time that his friend Lady

Saxondale needed a page. He gave me a note to her ladyship, and thus was it that I entered this mansion."

Francis Paton ceased speaking, and the big tears rolled down his cheeks, as all the incidents of the past were thus brought so vividly back to his mind. Again did Juliana do her best to soothe and console him, and the youth was both soothed and consoled.

"But during all the latter portion of your narrative," said the Honourable Miss Farefield, "you have lost sight of your sister. Believe me, my dear Frank, I am interested in her for your sake."

"I have already given you to understand," answered the youth, "that when she was twenty — that was about six years ago — she entered a family in the capacity of governess, and proceeded to the Continent. From time to time I received letters from her, and occasionally little presents, whenever she had an opportunity of sending to England. But at length, after the lapse of a couple of years, her letters ceased altogether. When I became uneasy at this silence, the schoolmaster — for I was then, you know, at Southampton — said many things to relieve me of my apprehensions, and it even struck me that he knew more than he chose to admit. But this might have been mere fancy on my part. Suffice it to say, Miss Farefield — Juliana — that for the last four years I have heard nothing from my sister — "

"Hush! footsteps are approaching," suddenly exclaimed Juliana, whose quick ears had caught the sound.

As she thus spoke she pressed the young page's hand tenderly, threw a fervid look of passion upon him, and then composed herself in her seat with the air of one just beginning to turn over the leaves of a periodical placed in her hand. Francis Paton retreated toward the door, which opened at the instant, and Constance, now elegantly dressed in evening costume, reappeared. She at once perceived by the young page's manner that Juliana had been speaking to him upon the tender subject the secret of which she herself had that day learned, and as the door closed behind the beautiful youth, she advanced up to her sister, saying, in a gentle voice, "I hope that you are happy now."

"Yes, dear Constance, supremely happy," exclaimed Juliana, rising from her seat and embracing her sister in the effusion of that joy which her long interview with the young

page had excited in her soul. " I have revealed the secret of my love, and he loves me in return. But you would scarcely believe how intellectual he is. Oh, what a scandal and a shame ever to have doomed Francis Paton to servitude! Besides, he has told me the history of his life, and it is a history so full of strange romance and profound mystery that I feel for him an illimitable sympathy as well as the tenderest love. But all these things I will explain to you another time — "

At this moment the door opened, and Mary Anne the lady's-maid entered the room.

" He is come? " said Constance, quickly, while a glow of pleasure suffused itself upon her countenance.

" My lord marquis is in the garden," returned Mary Anne, with the mysterious look of a confidante.

" Oh, then I will proceed thither at once," exclaimed Constance. " Give me my guitar. I will take it with me; it serves as an apology for burying myself in the shady recesses of the arbour should I be noticed proceeding thither by the domestics. But you must keep watch, Mary Anne, and you also, dear sister."

" Fear not," responded Juliana, " you shall not be surprised by any one."

Constance accordingly took her guitar, and tripping lightly down-stairs, proceeded to the garden, where in a few moments she was clasped in the arms of her lover, the Marquis de Villebelle.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LADY'S-MAID — THE STOLEN INTERVIEW

Mary Anne was one of the handsomest as well as the astutest and discreetest of lady's-maids. She was a fine, tall, well-grown young woman, of about three and twenty, with a figure that had something brilliant and splendid in its Diana-like proportions. Many a lady of rank who shone in the gorgeous saloons of fashion might have envied Mary Anne that superb shape, for nothing could be more graceful than the slope of the shoulders, the bend in the back, the symmetry of the waist, and the sweeping length of limb whose fine proportions were displayed in one sense though concealed in another by the long skirt of the dress.

Mary Anne's countenance was not merely pretty, it was handsome. Her brown hair was of remarkable luxuriance, and whether arranged in plain bands in the morning part of the day, or in long, shining ringlets in the evening, it set off to equal advantage the fine face that beamed with mingled archness and good-humour. There was something slightly coquettish in Mary Anne's air and appearance. She wore an elegant little French cap, as if she knew that it became her admirably, and every detail of her toilet denoted not merely a scrupulous neatness, but likewise a tastefulness which nearly bordered upon elegance, — that is to say, as much elegance as a lady's-maid could possibly throw into her apparel. Her clothes were evidently made by no cheap milliner or clumsy seamstress, but fitted her as perfectly as if she were a lady of rank and fortune.

As a matter of course, she had handsome perquisites in the discarded dresses of her young mistresses, but these were never cobbled up anew for Miss Mary Anne. She accepted cast-off clothes, but would not wear them, not she

indeed! She disposed of them to an old Jewess who regularly paid her a visit by the area steps once every month to purchase whatsoever she might have to dispose of, so that with the produce of these little sales and a small portion of her own handsome wages in addition, Mary Anne was enabled to find herself in frequent new dresses of good material. As for the making-up of these dresses, that was done for nothing by the milliner who had all the custom of Lady Saxondale and her daughters, the said milliner finding it entirely to her interest to keep good friends with so important a person as the Honourable Misses Farefield's principal lady's-maid.

Mary Anne had, as we have already stated, a slightly coquettish air, and this, blended with a certain archness of expression and roguishness of smile, gave her a most piquant and interesting appearance. She looked the lady's-maid. From the midst of a thousand females assembled together, of every variety of occupation and grade, you might single out Mary Anne as the abigail of aristocratic mistresses. Nor was this all. A close observer could not fail to perceive that she was a confidential maid, deep in the secrets of the young ladies whom she served. Yet be it parenthetically remarked that she was not initiated in that particular secret which involved Juliana's attachment for the young page.

In order to render this portrait as complete as possible, we must observe that Mary Anne possessed a very fine pair of dark hazel eyes, which she could use with no small effect when she chose, but all the glances of which were so tutored and disciplined as to be completely under her own control. Thus, in the presence of Lady Saxondale she appeared sedate and respectful, almost to demureness; with her young mistresses there was a more joyous and genial light dancing in her eyes, indicating that she felt herself the petted and favourite confidante, but still so far subdued as likewise to show that she knew her place too well to take any advantage of the confidence she thus enjoyed. Indeed, there was never anything like undue familiarity in her look, her words, or her manner. The brows that set off those fine eyes were darkly pencilled and splendidly arched, and the lashes which served as a screen for her looks when she chose thus to veil them were of a darker shade still and resembled thick silken fringes. Her nose was straight, her mouth small and pouting,

the lips being of a rich redness and always of a delicious moisture; they were lips that seemed to invite kisses, and appeared fully capable of giving them back again with additional sweets. The expression of her countenance, though naturally a mixture of good-humour, archness, and roguishness, was variable, because, as we have already stated, she had the faculty of tutoring it to assume any look that suited the circumstances of the moment.

Although so remarkably handsome, and therefore exposed to many temptations, especially on the part of the profligate Lord Saxondale, and though by no means of a cold temperament, but, on the contrary, with the rich warm blood of youth glowing in her veins, Miss Mary Anne was notwithstanding unquestionably virtuous. She could flirt with handsome valets and the upper class of male domestics, she could even smile mischievously and display her fine white teeth when any aristocratic young exquisite, visiting at the mansion, paid her a passing compliment if they chanced to meet upon the stairs, but if any improper overtures were made to Miss Mary Anne she knew how to resent them in a manner that would most likely silence for ever him who insulted her with such proposals. We do not know that it can be exactly said she was virtuous from principle; indeed, it would be wrong to make any such assertion. But she was a saving and prudent young woman in money-matters, had thoroughly respectable notions with regard to her character, and looked forward to a good marriage with some deserving and eligible person in her own sphere of life. Thus, though Mary Anne could smile roguishly, assist in a love-intrigue carried on by others, and deliver a billet-doux with all the slyness and discretion imaginable, and though on occasions she could not merely flirt but even romp with the domestics in the servants' hall, on a Christmas or New Year's eve, yet there was a line at which she stopped short, and beyond which it would be very difficult to induce her to take a false step.

Such was the lady's-maid who possessed the confidence of her two young mistresses generally, but of Constance especially, and she had proved herself a most efficient auxiliary in enabling this latter lady to carry on her secret interviews with the Marquis of Villebelle. She was therefore now on the alert to watch for the return of Lady Saxondale,

or the presence of any other person who might interrupt the meeting of the lovers in the garden.

We should observe that of all the splendid mansions in Park Lane not one possessed so large a piece of ground in the rear as Saxondale House. Not that this was very large, either, and for a garden in the country it would have been ridiculously small, but for a town residence it was the very reverse. Being crowded with evergreens, which had grown to a considerable size and formed shady walks, — indeed, embowering some spots so completely as to shut out the view from all the adjacent windows, — this garden was well adapted for the meeting of lovers.

But how was it, the reader may ask, that Constance could not devise opportunities of seeing the Marquis of Villebelle in places where they might be still less liable to interruption? Those who are acquainted with the routine of fashionable life must be aware how difficult it is for young unmarried ladies to find such occasions. If the Misses Farefield went out to walk, they had a tall footman following at a short distance, and if they went out in the carriage, it was impossible to alight and leave the equipage for any length of time, unattended and alone, without incurring the risk of gossiping observations on the part of the servants. If they went shopping they were certain to meet so many of their acquaintances that it would be dangerous to seek such opportunities for the interviews of love; and inasmuch as the Marquis of Villebelle had for some months ceased to visit at Saxondale House, the only way in which Constance could contrive to pass an hour alone with him was by these clandestine meetings in the garden. The servants, generally, thought that the young lady buried herself for an occasional hour in the umbrageous recesses of the garden for the purpose of practising on her guitar, and thus when the sounds of that instrument were heard emanating from amidst the evergreens at the extremity of the enclosure, none of the domestics would venture to penetrate thither. A side door, of which it was easy for Mary Anne to obtain the key, was wont to afford admission to the Marquis of Villebelle; but on three or four occasions when a half-hour's interview was to be stolen after dusk, and when the key was not immediately forthcoming, the intrepid Frenchman had not hesitated to scale the boundary-wall.

Let us now introduce this foreign nobleman to our readers. He was about twenty-eight years of age, remarkably handsome, with a somewhat pensive and even melancholy expression of countenance. Tall and well formed, his figure combined dignity and elegance. He had dark hair, clustering in natural waves above a forehead of noble height. His eyes were large and black, and with a peculiar softness of look. There was a very pleasing expression about his lips, and his teeth were white and faultlessly even. He spoke the English language with a perfect accent and fluency; his voice, naturally low, was full of a deep music that gave to its tones a wonderful fascination when breathing the language of love.

Such was the Marquis of Villebelle. His father, who had been dead some years, was a refugee during the period of the Empire, and having lived a considerable time in England, he for this and other reasons conceived such an affection for its hospitable shores that he had his son educated at one of our public schools. Hence the intimate acquaintance which Etienne possessed in all things pertaining to the English language and literature; and in habits, tastes, and ideas, as well as in personal appearance, the Marquis of Villebelle was much more of an Englishman than a Frenchman. By the time he had finished his education in this country, his father died, and he was recalled to France to look after his affairs. For some years he remained on the Continent without revisiting England, but at length he returned to the land which he loved better than his own. This was about twelve months prior to the date when we now introduce him to our readers, and when we find him seeking a clandestine interview with the beautiful Constance Farefield in the garden of Saxondale House.

Fond and affectionate was the meeting of the lovers. The marquis strained Constance to his breast, pouring the delicious language of love in her ears, and she clung to him with all a maiden's confiding affection, drinking in the low, melting harmony of his voice. She looked sweetly beautiful, did Constance Farefield, for she was dressed in evening costume, so that she might be in readiness for the dinner-table when the hour should come. Her long, fair hair flowed in thick clusters upon her white shoulders, and though there was no small contrast between her style of beauty and the

personal tributes of her lover, yet were it impossible to deny that they would make a remarkably interesting couple.

"How long, my sweet Constance," said the marquis, as they sat down together upon a bench beneath the verdant covering of the trees, "are we to pursue this stealthy and clandestine course, — a course which, though marked by so many hours of indescribable happiness, has nevertheless in it something humiliating alike to your feelings and mine."

"What would you have me do, my beloved Etienne?" asked Constance, gazing affectionately upon his countenance. "I tremble at the idea of a furtive marriage."

"Listen, my sweet Constance," exclaimed the marquis, in a tone of firmness and resolution. "I have not concealed from you that my resources are small, that, indeed, they are so limited as to be only sufficient for one, and would constitute privation if not poverty for two. But I have now the hope of obtaining diplomatic employment from King Louis Philippe's government. The recent change in the French Ministry has brought into power an old and devoted friend of my father's, and I believe, therefore, that I shall not now have to ask a favour in vain. Tell me then, Constance, tell me, my well-beloved, will you consent to become mine if I succeed in obtaining a post which shall guarantee me the means of maintaining you in comfort, if not in splendour?"

"Splendour, my dear Etienne!" returned Constance. "Oh, let not that word be associated with love! I seek not for splendour, I am sick of the present splendour in which I live. The gaieties, the dissipations, and the frivolities of fashionable life seem a mockery to the soul that longs for a blissful seclusion with the object of its love. Think not, therefore, that if in wedding you I should wed even poverty that reproaches or regrets would ever fall from my lips. No, no, that were impossible. But —"

"You hesitate, Constance, you hesitate?" murmured Etienne, as his arm gently encircled her waist, and he gazed fondly upon the countenance on which a shade of mournfulness had suddenly settled. "Tell me, my sweet girl, wherefore do you hesitate? Have you no confidence in my love, or do you believe I am the unprincipled adventurer that I know your mother has sought to represent me?"

"No, no, not for an instant do I entertain such a dis-

honouring, such an injurious thought," and Constance showed by her looks, her accents, and her manner that she was deeply pained by the remark her lover had made. "Besides, Etienne, what could you think of me, if supposing for a moment that I did entertain such a dark suspicion, you still find me meeting you thus, accepting the assurances of your love, giving you mine in return, and willing to entrust all my life's happiness to your keeping? No, deeply and devotedly as I love you, if I thought that you were other than I believe you to be, we should part at once, never to meet again. And if I could not tear forth this love from the depths of my soul, I would rather suffer it to devour my heart in secret than let it hurry me on into degradation and error. Moreover, you have dealt candidly with me in respect to your circumstances."

"And yet again you hesitate, Constance?" said the marquis, perceiving that she stopped short, as if about to give utterance to something which she nevertheless trembled to speak.

"Oh, I will be candid with you, I will be candid with you," rejoined Constance. "You have asked me how long these stealthy interviews are to continue, and you know, indeed, you have more than hinted, that the only way to annihilate the necessity thereof is by our marriage. Now," continued Constance, bending down her looks and speaking in a low, tremulous tone, "among the various things which my mother has at different times let drop concerning you, there is one allegation on which I have never touched before, which I have never even hinted to you, and to which I would not allude, however distantly, because I dared not so far shock your feelings."

"Speak, speak, Constance. Be frank and candid," said the marquis; but his own voice was now trembling as if with anxiety and suspense, and the arm that encircled the maiden's waist was trembling likewise.

"Oh, I dare not, no, I dare not proceed further," murmured Constance, now bursting into tears as a feeling of deep despondency suddenly seized upon her; for indeed it struck her that the matter to which she was thus alluding did not altogether involve a wanton calumny.

"Constance," exclaimed the marquis, more vehemently than he was wont to speak, "you alarm me. What means

this outburst of emotion? Is it something so very serious, or so very terrible? "

"Ah! it would be alike serious and terrible if true," responded the young lady, now suddenly raising her eyes and gazing with a mixture of inquiring earnestness and reviving confidence in her lover's countenance. "But no, it is impossible, it cannot be true. You would not deceive me thus."

"Constance, what mean you, what mean you?" exclaimed the marquis, painfully excited. "Do not hesitate to speak. There must be no reserve between us —"

"No, there must not be — I feel that there must not be," interrupted the young lady. "Some months have elapsed since first from my mother's lips dropped the statement which now weighs upon my mind, and for the reasons I have already explained I would not mention it to you. But this day I have had a serious conversation with my sister, and I have been led more than ever to feel the importance of removing every doubt and dissipating every suspicion, — the more so since you yourself, Etienne, began the conversation ere now by the assurance that a favourable turn in your circumstances would soon enable you to conduct me to the altar. Therefore, now, on this present occasion, must we converse frankly."

"It is what I wish, Constance. I have already told you so," said the marquis, with some degree of vehemence, "and I can assure you, my sweet girl, that you are torturing me most acutely by this delay in telling me everything. Say what it is that hangs like a doubt upon your mind, and to which you are so reluctant to give utterance."

"Etienne," responded Constance, raising her beautiful blue eyes and fixing them earnestly upon her lover, "I am told that you have already been married, and that although separated from your wife, she is still alive."

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of the Marquis of Villebelle, he could not have been more dismayed. It was a perfect consternation that seized upon him; he turned pale as death, the arm that was engirdling Constance fell as if palsied from her waist, and he gazed upon her in vacant bewilderment.

"O God!" cried the unhappy young lady, "it is true, it is too true!" and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a passionate flood of weeping.

" Yes, it is true, it is true! " echoed the marquis, in a tone of rending agony. " But good God! how could this secret have been known? "

" Ah! little matter how it was known," murmured Constance, stricken with despair, " since you confess it is the truth. Oh, Etienne, wherefore have you deceived me thus? " and starting from her seat, she was about to break away from him with frantic excitement, when he took her hand, he fell upon his knees, he besought her to remain, he implored her to tarry for a few minutes to hear him.

There was a desperation in his looks and a wildness in his tone which frightened Constance Farefield, and though she felt hurt, mortified, and wounded in all her keenest sensibilities, though it appeared as if all the happiness of her life were suddenly annihilated by a single blow, yet she could not leave him thus, for she felt that she loved him still.

" Speak, Etienne," she said, in a low, deep tone clouded with ineffable emotions. " I will not refuse you a hearing."

She resumed her seat; he placed himself by her side, and would have still retained her hand in his own, but she gently withdrew it, and then her grief burst forth anew in convulsing sobs.

" Oh, calm yourself, calm yourself, I implore you," he said, in accents of passionate entreaty. " Would you see me kill myself at your feet? But I can endure anything rather than this anguish of yours. The spectacle drives me mad, because it is I who have caused it. Yet if you knew all."

" Then tell me everything, be frank and candid with me," said Constance. " And, oh," she added, in a voice full of gushing emotion, " if there be extenuation on your behalf, God knows that I shall only be too willing to admit it."

" If you will grant me your patience, Constance," resumed the marquis, " I will tell you everything, and you will hear one of the most extraordinary histories that ever fell from the lips of human being. Talk of the incidents of novels and romances being extravagant! Their interest palls and wanes into mawkish insipidity, their excitement subsides into monotony and dulness, when compared with the story I am about to relate. And that there is extenuation, if not a complete vindication for the course I have pursued in respect to yourself, Constance, I may venture to promise. Nay,

I do not even know but that I should have been fully justified in averring that I am not a married man at this moment."

"Oh, if all this be true!" exclaimed Constance, her countenance brightening up with the animation of hope; for hers had a few moments back been a despair so profound that even the slightest glimmering which bade her hope again was a relief ineffable.

"Shall I commence at once?" asked the French nobleman, in a low, soft voice, and again he took her hand, which was not now withdrawn.

"Yes, proceed, Etienne, proceed, and may God grant — But I am tortured with suspense. Proceed."

The Marquis of Villebelle accordingly commenced, in the following manner:

"You are aware that my father, being devoted to the cause of the Bourbons, lost all his immense estates in France by confiscation when the first Revolution broke out; you are likewise aware that when the Bourbons were restored they behaved with the deepest ingratitude to my father, refusing him any indemnification for the losses he had sustained on their behalf. It was through disgust at their conduct, as much as through love for this country, that he preferred a residence in England rather than in his own native land. It is exactly eight years ago, consequently in 1836, that my father returned for the last time to France, in the hope of receiving from the hand of Louis Philippe (who had then been six years on the throne) that justice which had been denied by Louis XVIII and Charles X. But scarcely had he set foot on his native soil when he was seized with a dangerous illness, which in a few days proved fatal.

"I had been left behind him in England, but upon receiving the sad intelligence of my father's death, I hastened to Paris. After the funeral I proceeded, by the aid of a notary, to examine into my late parent's affairs. Alas! I found them in the most deplorable condition. In short, I inherited little beyond the bare title of a marquis, and oh, how valueless was that title! Better, better far to have been reared to some honest trade than to have been brought up with the lofty notions of rank and high birth. My condition was hopeless in the extreme. I had no relations to help me on in the world, for all my kindred, alike on my father's and mother's side, were either dead or dispersed by

various circumstances and vicissitudes over the face of the earth. What was I to do? The notary suggested that I should memorialize King Louis Philippe, setting forth the claims which I inherited from my father, and explaining my position. I adopted this course, but Louis Philippe had no sympathy with the old nobility who had served the elder branch of Bourbons, he being the representative of the younger. My memorial therefore produced no effect. Time passed on, and I endeavoured to obtain the influence of some eminent men to induce the king to alter his decision, but all in vain; and while I was thus suffering the tortures of hope deferred, my slender means were rapidly disappearing. Thus nearly three years passed away, and at length I could no longer close my eyes to the conviction that I had nothing to expect from the hand of the royalty of France. I am now speaking of exactly five years ago, at which period the incident occurred to which all that I have just been saying is but the necessary preface."

The Marquis of Villebelle paused in the sadness of the memories conjured up by his narrative, and Constance could not help experiencing the most tender interest on his behalf. She even ceased to recollect for the moment the deception which he had practised toward her, and he felt that her hand imparted a fond pressure to his own as he held it in his clasp.

"Five years ago, then, at the period of which I am speaking," continued the Marquis of Villebelle, "I found myself utterly ruined, — I may say even penniless, houseless, and friendless. Alas! Constance, humiliating as it is to a man of proud spirit and elevated notions to make such a confession, yet for the sake of truth am I bound to state that no pauper grovelling upon the face of the earth was at that moment more destitute than I. What was to become of me? My education had not fitted me for business habits, and therefore I knew beforehand that it was vain to seek the situation of a clerk. Should I become a private soldier? No, I could not bear the idea of serving with my sword that monarch who had behaved so ungratefully to my father and so scornfully toward myself. Yet was it absolutely necessary to do something, for I had not even where to lay my head, nor the smallest coin in my pocket. Suicide — Ah! you may well start, my beloved Constance, but that appeared to be the only alternative.

" It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, in the month of June, exactly five years ago, that, after rambling about Paris the whole day in a state of mind more easily imagined than depicted, I was bending my way toward one of the bridges — I will not repeat with what intention — when I suddenly heard myself called by name. I looked up, and beheld before me, by the light streaming from a shop-window, a tall, good-looking, middle-aged gentleman, whom by his very appearance it was easy to recognize as an Englishman. He said, ' I presume that I am not wrong in addressing you as the Count de Villebelle? ' I replied that my father had for some time been dead, and that I was now the Marquis of Villebelle, and in the bitterness of my spirit I added something to the effect that the empty title of marquis was everything I possessed in the world. ' Ah! ' ejaculated the Englishman, ' is it so? I was about to solicit your advice on a certain point, but it may be that in this wrecked condition of your fortunes you yourself will serve my purpose.' These last words he had muttered in a musing tone, but audibly enough for me to catch them. There was something in them which appeared to shed a gleam of hope on the desolate darkness of my mind, and as a drowning man grasps at a straw, did I clutch at what the Englishman had just said.

" He invited me to follow him into an adjacent wine-shop, where he ordered a private room and refreshments to be served up. We sat down together, and the Englishman questioned me most minutely respecting my circumstances. There appeared to be a certain frankness about him which inspired me with confidence, and, moreover, it was so necessary for me to hope, — I who had been but a few minutes before environed by the darkness of despair. I explained to the Englishman my precise position, not even withholding the fact that at the very instant I had encountered him I was contemplating — but of that no matter. I will not name the horrid thing again. Suffice it to say that he listened with the deepest attention and interest to all I told him, and when he had done questioning me, I asked him who he was and how he had happened to know me. He replied that he had met me in company with my father, some four or five years back, in England, when I was a youth; but though methought that his countenance was not wholly unfamiliar, yet I could not recollect where I had seen him before. He

then proceeded to tell me that if the proposition he was about to make suited my views, it would be necessary for him to reveal his name, and also that of a young lady of whom he would have to speak; but ere he mentioned those names he would have to exact from me the most solemn, sacred, and binding oath that I would never reveal them in connection with the transaction he was about to submit to my consideration. My case was too desperate to allow me to offer any objection to whatever terms of secrecy he might stipulate, and I bade him proceed.

" He then addressed me as follows: ' There is an English lady for whom I am anxious to find a husband, who must be a foreigner, and not only of a good family, but possessed of a title of nobility. It is not under any circumstances of dishonour in respect to the lady herself that the necessity for at once marrying her thus exists. She is pure and spotless, so far as it is possible for any one to judge of the character of a woman or become a guarantee for her chastity. Therefore it is to cover no fault that this speedy matrimonial alliance is sought for. What the circumstances are which render it necessary cannot be explained. She is exceedingly handsome, but her beauty will matter little to him who becomes her husband, inasmuch as the moment after the ceremony they will be separated and will see each other no more. You now understand me. If you think fit to bestow your name — for it will be nought beyond the mere bestowal of a name — upon the lady in question, you shall receive the sum of five thousand pounds, speaking in English money, the moment after the ceremony has taken place. Such is my proposition. Take twelve, or even twenty-four hours to consider it, if you like, but at the expiration of that interval your answer must be given."

The Marquis of Villebelle paused, and Constance, who had listened with a deep and absorbing interest, now gave vent to an ejaculation of astonishment.

" You may well be surprised, sweet girl," said the marquis, " for I myself was astounded by the strangeness of the Englishman's proposition. And yet I was scarcely displeased at it. Five thousand pounds, a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, to a man who was homeless, penniless, friendless, and starving! The temptation was too great, and, after all, what was the service to be rendered in order

to procure such a sum? Merely the bestowal of a name and title so utterly worthless to me that, a few minutes back, I had been hurrying forward to bury them along with myself in the deep waters of the Seine. Oh, you can scarcely think ill of me, Constance, when I confess that I found the offer too cheering, too magnificent, to be refused, and that instead of taking twenty-four hours or even twelve hours to reflect upon the point, I gave my assent at once. The Englishman then told me his own name and that of the young lady to whom I was to be married. Her surname was quite different from his own, and therefore I did not suppose her to be his daughter. I however asked him if such were the case, and he said she was not, but he enjoined me not to question him any further, as there was so deep a mystery attached to this young lady, and the necessity for maintaining it was so absolute he must decline furnishing me with any clue for its unravelment. He then placed a purse of money in my hand and bade me meet him at the same place on the following day at eleven o'clock. We separated, and I was no longer houseless nor penniless, but throughout the night I could scarcely close my eyes in slumber. The proposition to which I had assented was so extraordinary that again and again did I hesitate whether to proceed any further in the matter, but the grim, gaunt spectre of poverty constantly rose up before my eyes and made all my scruples vanish.

"Morning came, and with some portion of the money contained in the purse, I made such improvements in my toilet as were suitable for the ceremony about to take place. Punctual to the hour was I at the wine-shop; the Englishman had already arrived and was waiting for me. He doubtless saw by my looks that I had not changed my mind, and he did not therefore ask me the question. A hackney-coach was summoned, and he ordered it to take us to a hotel which he named, in another part of Paris. On arriving there, he introduced me to a suite of apartments, in one of which he requested me to be seated for a few minutes. He then passed into an inner room, and shortly reappeared, accompanied by three ladies. One was nearly as old as himself, and whom he introduced as his wife. Another was much younger, and was intended to act as bridesmaid. I believe she was some relation of his, but I do not exactly know of what degree. The third was the young lady on whom I was

to bestow my name. She was indeed handsome, very handsome. Do not be jealous, Constance, at the observation I have made, for while doing justice to her personal appearance, I may with equal candour declare that hers was not a style of beauty adapted to my taste.

" On this part of my narrative I will not however dwell. Suffice it to say that she appeared to treat the strange proceeding with a coldness almost amounting to an indifference that was not the least extraordinary feature in the whole transaction, for I could not help asking myself of what nature might be the circumstances that rendered necessary so singular a matrimonial alliance. To bestow upon that young lady a husband who was to be no husband at all, to give her a name which she might bear in the world apart from him of whom she had derived it, to make her a wife, yet leave her to a single and virgin state of existence, if chaste she really were and meant to continue, — all this seemed so monstrous, so unnatural, that I shrank from the bare idea on being introduced to her. There was not, however, much leisure permitted for meditation, because the Englishman hurried us all down to a plain carriage that was waiting in the courtyard of the hotel, and we drove off to the British ambassador's chapel, which was at no great distance. I should observe that the ladies were simply dressed, with no conspicuous evidences that this was a bridal party. All the preliminaries for the solemn ceremony had been arranged with due care, so that on reaching the chapel we found the chaplain and clerk in attendance, and the proceedings at once commenced. I must confess that I experienced a strange sensation as I went through that ceremony. My conscience smote me with a pang resembling a remorse, for I could not help feeling that it was a veritable mockery of one of the holiest rites of the Christian Church. I glanced toward my bride, and observed that she was still as calm, collected, and even indifferent as if it were some ordinary transaction, and not one of the serious character that it really was. For in thus bestowing her hand upon me was not this young woman, in the vigour of youth and in the bloom of her beauty, suicidally destroying all hope of ever enjoying real happiness in the wedded state? In short, by this very marriage with me, was she not shutting herself out from the prospect of ever marrying another, however deeply she might be led

to love and however fondly she might be beloved in return?

" But it is useless now to moralize on all the features and associations of that mysterious transaction. Suffice it to say that the ceremony was accomplished, and that the young lady within the space of a few brief minutes was made Marchioness of Villebelle. We all reëntered the carriage, and returned to the hotel, the Englishman and his wife conversing the whole time on general and indifferent topics, for the evident purpose of preventing that awkwardness and embarrassment which under such extraordinary circumstances would have otherwise prevailed. On arriving at the hotel, the three ladies each shook hands with me and bade me adieu, my wife exhibiting no more excitement or emotion than the other two. They then all three passed to the inner room, and I remained alone with the Englishman. He forthwith began to count down a number of bank-notes upon the table, and as he thus paid me the promised reward for the singular and mysterious service I had rendered, he said, ' Do not think that because we are now about to part I shall altogether lose sight of you. If fortune smiles upon you and you continue independent of any friendly aid, you will never hear from me, but if adversity overtakes you and you fall into poverty again, you may rely upon receiving succour from my hand. And now farewell.' This was a hint for me to take my departure at once, and I can assure you, my dear Constance, that I had no inclination to remain, for I already began not merely to loathe myself, but likewise all who were connected with the transaction."

The Marquis of Villebelle ceased, and Constance Farefield sat gazing upon him with looks of mingled commiseration and uncertainty. She pitied him for all he had gone through, she could scarcely blame him for the step he had taken, under such peculiar circumstances, in order to save himself from the horrors of poverty and the dismal alternative of suicide, but she was bewildered how she herself could thenceforth act toward him. Suddenly a recollection flashed to her mind, bringing hope along with it, and she said, in an excited tone, " But did you not tell me ere now that you would be almost justified in declaring yourself to be unmarried? What meant you by that averment? What did it signify? What am I to understand? Speak, speak, Etienne. You

know not what torturing suspense I at this moment endure, for all my happiness hangs upon the next word that may fall from your lips."

"I will soon explain myself, dear Constance," replied the marquis, his countenance brightening up somewhat, or, at all events, losing a portion of the melancholy cloud which had been hanging upon it. "But ere I make known the meaning of those words which I spoke just now, and of which you have reminded me, it is necessary I should enter into a few more particulars respecting myself. For you must not think, Constance, that the large sum of money which I received in such a manner and for such a service made me happy. No, no, far from it. It was the utter desperation of my circumstances which induced me to render that service and take the reward. Heaven knows that by nature I am not mean, nor mercenary, nor dishonourable. Nothing of the reckless adventurer is there in my character. I was the creature of circumstances; it was an imperious necessity that ruled me. But when it was all over, I felt as if I had committed a crime and done a dishonourable action, and within twenty-four hours of that solemn mockery which gave me a wife and her dower, but deprived me of the former and made me unhappy with the latter, I sped to the hotel to return the money and insist upon steps being taken for the annulment of the marriage. But the Englishman and his companions had gone.

"In order to banish the unpleasant reflections which now haunted me by day and by night, I embarked in commercial speculations, not so much in the hope of increasing my means as of amusing my mind. For three or four years they progressed favourably enough, but at length a sudden panic paralyzed all my schemes, and the failure of a bank threatened me with ruin. Day and night did I toil to disentangle my affairs from the vortex of difficulty and embarrassment in which they were plunged, and I succeeded so far that I paid my liabilities with honourable exactitude, and found a surplus of a few hundreds of pounds remaining for my own use.

"Sick of commercial pursuits and financial speculations, I came over to England. Then was it, dearest Constance, that I became acquainted with you, and as to know you is to love you, I learned to love you fondly. Oh, I need not

tell you over again how deeply I love you. That I was wrong, cruelly situated as I am, to whisper the tale of love in your ears, there can be no doubt, but this love which I entertain for you became indispensable to my happiness, it gave me a new existence, and it seemed to promise felicity for the future. Could I resign it? Could I abandon this dream of bliss? Besides, during the interval which had then elapsed since my marriage, that fatal, that cursed marriage, I had never seen my wife, never heard of her, could not even learn what had become of her, and had never even caught the faintest whisper to the effect that there was a being in the world bearing the name of the Marchioness of Villebelle.

"Secretly did I prosecute inquiries in London to ascertain if such a lady were known in the circles of fashion, but to my joy I could hear of nothing of the sort. I inquired also after that Englishman, whose name I dare not mention, for I resolved if I could hear of him to seek him out and ascertain if my wife were still alive. All I could however learn was that the individual alluded to was on the Continent, but that his whereabouts was not known. I therefore naturally concluded that some fresh circumstances had transpired to induce the lady to discard the name and title she had obtained by her marriage with me, and it was under this belief, sweet Constance, that I ventured to breathe my tale of love and whisper my hopes in your ears. Am I so deeply to blame? Oh, if you had been less beautiful, less fascinating, less fond, less affectionate, I might have yielded to the calmness of reflection, I might have bowed to a sense of duty, I might have smothered this passion of mine when it was as yet a nascent flame. But I adored you, I adore you still, I shall adore you ever, even though at the expiration of this interview we part to meet no more."

"But the meaning of those words, Etienne?" murmured Constance, profoundly moved, and her heart fluttering with hope and suspense. "Tell me, tell me, what did they signify? For I see that there is yet something left untold, something that warranted you to declare that you would not be altogether unjustified in representing yourself as a single man."

"To that explanation I now come," responded the marquis, whose arm had once more engirdled Miss Farefield's waist, and from which she did not withdraw. "Within the

last three weeks I met her whom I have been compelled to regard and to speak of as my wife."

"Ah, then you know that she is alive, and you have seen her?" exclaimed Constance, in accents expressive of disappointment and sorrow.

"Yes, I have seen her, and when I tell you the result of our meeting you may not perhaps look thus distressed. I will not pause to explain under what circumstances it was that I met her. Suffice it to say that we did thus meet three weeks ago, and our recognition was immediate and mutual. It was in the environs of London that I thus encountered her. She was elegantly dressed, and had the appearance of being in the most comfortable circumstances. It was rather in a tone of raillery and a kind of good-humoured jocularity that she spoke. I asked her if she had ever borne my name in the presence of the world, and she assured me she had not. I next asked her if she considered she had any claim upon me as a husband, to which she likewise answered in the negative. 'Now, understand me,' she said, 'I do not wish to interfere with you, and I presume that you do not intend to interfere with me. The necessity which compelled me to marry you was of a transient character; the purpose was served on the instant, and if we could now unmarry ourselves I should be full willing.' These words sent a thrill of joy to my heart. She observed my emotion, and went on to say, 'Although we are such strangers to each other, and although I consequently know so little of you, yet you may rest assured that what trifling amount of feeling I do experience in the matter is rather of a friendly character than otherwise, and I think by your manner there is something you would wish at my hands. If so, speak, and hesitate not. Do you want money?'

"I at once interrupted her with the assurance that I entertained no such mean and mercenary idea, and I then very frankly proceeded to inform her that I was enamoured of a young lady with whose love I was blessed in return, that I had not dared reveal to her the circumstance of my wedded condition, but that if it were possible to procure and destroy the evidences of that marriage the boon conferred upon me would be immense. Hereupon my wife at once promised to relieve my mind in this respect. She told me that she was in possession of the marriage certificate,

together with certain documents testifying to the authenticity of that certificate, and signed by those who witnessed the bridal. All these papers she frankly offered to place in my hands, so that I might do with them as I chose. You may conceive, Constance, with what joy and gratitude I accepted this offer. She accordingly made an appointment for me to receive the papers, and she promised that they should be faithfully remitted to me on the day, at the hour, and at the place named. We then parted, as mere acquaintances, in the same way that we had just met, our interview having lasted but for a few minutes, and the whole conversation being confined to the topics which I have mentioned. We did not even shake hands, nor make any inquiry into each other's circumstances, beyond the one question which my wife put to me whether I was in want of money.

"I have now nothing more to say, unless it be to add that the appointment was faithfully kept by an emissary from my wife, and the papers were all placed in my hand. I have them at my residence, I have not destroyed them, and were it not for my oath's sake, I would show them to you, dear Constance. But I dare not reveal the names which appear in the marriage certificate and the other documents. Now, save and except the entry in the register at the British ambassador's chapel in Paris, no evidence could possibly be produced — unless, indeed, by my own hand — to prove that I was ever wedded to another. Finally, I will ask you, Constance, whether under all these circumstances, especially the last, I should not have been almost justified in representing myself as single and unmarried?"

Constance gave no immediate answer; she reflected profoundly. What course was she to pursue? That she might in all safety become the wife of the Marquis of Villebelle, without having her right to that name ever disputed, seemed beyond the possibility of doubt; but, on the other hand, could she look upon herself as the legitimate and lawful wife of this nobleman who had been wedded to another? Again, on the favourable side, it was scarcely to be supposed that the English law would recognize a marriage such as that which the marquis had been so mysteriously led into, inasmuch as it had never been consummated, and appeared on the very face of it a mockery too scandalous to be regarded in the light of a grave solemnity. And on this same favour-

able side, too, was the young lady's love for the French nobleman, so that after a few minutes' deliberation the arguments on this side proved the weightier; and extending her fair hand to the marquis, she exclaimed, " No, Etienne, I cannot separate from you. I cannot resign this dream of bliss. I love you, and in the world's despite will I love you on unto the end."

The marquis strained her to his breast, covered her lips and her cheeks with kisses, lavished upon her the tenderest epithets, and breathed the most solemn protestations and pledges in her ears.

" And now, dearest," he said, " you will not refuse to be mine so soon as I shall have obtained the means of guaranteeing an adequate maintenance? At the beginning of this conversation, I informed you that a change in the French Ministry had given power to an individual who has influence enough to compel the king to do me justice, though so tardily, and in a short time I may expect a diplomatic situation. Then — "

" Yes, then," murmured Constance, " I will become thine."

Again were there caressings and embracings and the breathing of tender vows; and the two lovers experienced, if possible, a greater amount of happiness, or, at all events, of satisfaction and content, in consequence of the explanations which had taken place on this memorable occasion.

" Now, dearest Constance," said the marquis, " you shall play me one of those beautiful airs which carry such ineffable bliss in unto my heart when the music is made by your fair fingers. You have your guitar with you, and I am sure that I shall not beseech this favour in vain."

Constance took up the instrument and began to run her fingers over the strings, while the marquis, rising from the seat, leaned against the pedestal of a huge vase that stood close by, so that his tender gaze might embrace the entire form of that ravishing creature whom he loved so fondly and who loved him so devotedly in return. But scarcely had the beauteous Constance begun to strike the strings of her guitar, when Juliana, who in the meanwhile had gone through the ceremony of the toilet and exchanged her *déshabillé* for a dinner costume, came hurrying down the gravel walk with the intimation that Lady Saxondale had

returned, and that she had intimated her intention of taking half an hour's ramble in the garden before dinner.

The marquis snatched a hasty embrace from his adored one, and hurriedly shaking hands with her sister, he made good his retreat by the side door of the garden.

CHAPTER XXX

FLORINA

We must now return to Lady Florina Staunton, whom we left at the moment when, scarcely able to subdue a violent outburst of her anguish, she sought the window recess with the seeming pretext of beholding the departure of Lady Saxondale's splendid equipage, but in reality for the purpose of hiding her tears. Lady Macdonald, not for an instant suspecting that every syllable Lady Saxondale had uttered was a dagger plunged deep down into the heart of her niece, began commenting in the bitterest manner upon the presumed insolence of William Deveril, and thus each word spoken by the aunt produced a fresh pang in the bosom of the gentle Florina. Still, however, did the unhappy young lady remain in the room, for she was afraid that by a too precipitate retreat she would excite Lady Macdonald's suspicion. It was an excruciation well-nigh intolerable which Florina thus suffered, or, rather, a series of excruciations more poignant than any that had ever previously entered into her young heart's experience.

Presently, after having delivered herself of an immensely long tirade of invectives against the young artist, Lady Macdonald rang the bell furiously, and when a footman answered the summons, she said, " When Mr. Deveril calls at the house again, you will tell him that his services can be dispensed with for the future, and that if he will send in his account a cheque shall be remitted for the sum."

" Yes, my lady," was the footman's reply, and he quitted the room.

Florina felt as if her heart must burst. She could endure this state of inward torture no longer, and quitting the drawing-room, she hastened up to her own chamber, where she

threw herself upon the couch and gave vent to her woe in a torrent of the bitterest weeping. Long, oh, far too long, poor girl, was that paroxysm of almost mortal anguish, — an anguish proportionate to the love which she experienced for Deveril, and that love itself was illimitable. When the violence of her emotions had somewhat exhausted itself and she began to feel that she was capable of serious reflection, she rose from the couch on which she had flung herself in her despair, and taking her seat on a sofa, endeavoured to reflect upon all that had occurred.

She could not altogether believe Lady Saxondale's story, and yet she could not altogether doubt it. She fancied that there must be some foundation for it, but that her ladyship, either in her vanity or her anger, had exaggerated many of the details. Deeply and devotedly as Florina loved William Deveril, and dreadful as it was to put faith in a narrative so damnatory to his sincerity, yet the young lady, inexperienced as she was in the ways of the world, could not possibly imagine that it was all false, and that, instead of a wanton inconstancy being imputed to Deveril, it was a sheer wickedness that lay at the door of Lady Saxondale. But though unable to believe in Deveril's complete innocence, Florina was not prepared to break off with him entirely without previously giving him an opportunity of explanation, or justification, if possible. There was still far too much confidence in her love not to induce her to adopt this course, and though tortured by horrible doubts as she was, there was likewise too much justice in her heart to permit the young damsel to condemn her lover upon that purely one-sided statement.

" And yet," she thought within herself, " what could he possibly say in his defence? There surely must be some foundation for Lady Saxondale's statements, and if that foundation be ever so slight, it is nevertheless sufficient to form a colossal monument of Deveril's perfidy toward me. Oh, who would have thought that when yesterday he knelt at my feet and poured forth the impassioned language of love, he could so soon repeat the tale elsewhere! It seems impossible, it seems impossible! Not merely is love outraged, but every idea of propriety, and even nature itself. It cannot be true. No, Deveril is incapable of such conduct. It would stamp him as false-hearted, vile, profligate, — and, oh, who could believe him to be all this? But Lady

Saxondale, would she invent such a story? For what purpose? Surely not to gratify her vanity? She who has had nobles falling at her feet and soliciting her hand needs not to vaunt the admiring homage of a humble artist, especially if that homage were never offered at all. But if not from vanity, was it wickedness? No, no, Lady Saxondale is incapable of that. A worldly-minded woman she is, but not so thoroughly black-hearted. Oh, I am tortured with suspense, I am racked with uncertainty. Would to Heaven that I had never known William Deveril at all, or, at least, that I had never loved him!"

Again did Florina's tears flow thick and fast, and her bosom was convulsed with sobs.

"Oh, if he were really innocent, after all," she continued in her musings, "what a frightful indignity is this which my aunt has ordered to be put upon him! To have the door shut in his face, to be told to send in his bill, like any tradesman who is discarded for insolence or some other fault — good heavens! if Deveril be innocent, I say, how keenly, how deeply will he feel this insult! And this is not all. His character will be ruined. Lady Saxondale is spreading the story — oh, she would not dare do this unless she had just ground. No, she would not dare do it, it is too serious, and I fear, oh, I fear, that Deveril is indeed false. Ah, why have I loved him? There is not a book I ever read and in which love is introduced, that it is not represented as enduring the severest trials. Why does every poet depict love as being thus tortured? Why does every novelist describe its current as never flowing smoothly? Because the poet and the novelist draw their inspirations from the facts passing in the great world before their eyes, and therefore it is the truth which they delineate. Oh, then this truth, this grand, striking, and imperious truth is that love must have its trials, its sorrows, and its disappointments, ay, and that the rose of love is too often doomed to wither prematurely and perish before its time. Alas, would that I had never allowed the rose of love to shed its fragrance upon my soul! It is a fragrance which a blight turns into a plague-mist, and which instils poison where it at first appeared to be only capable of shedding sweets."

In this manner mused the unhappy Florina Staunton, till at length her ideas reached a pitch so torturing, so

intolerable, that she felt she must do something in order to put an end to this state of mind. She must know the truth at once; to live tossed upon the waves of uncertainty were an existence which she could not endure. If Deveril had been guilty of all that Lady Saxondale imputed to him, the sooner Florina knew the worst the better. She could then summon all her fortitude to her aid, and endeavour to stifle her love in her heart. But if, on the other hand, William Deveril were innocent, if through misapprehension of his meaning at the time, or if in the spirit of sheer wickedness Lady Saxondale had recited her narrative, it was of the highest consequence that Deveril should be informed of what was being said against him. Thus in any case did Florina feel how paramount it was that she should have an interview with Deveril. But how was this to be managed? When he called at the house the door was to be shut in his face. She thought of writing to him, but if she proposed an appointment, where could they meet? The circumstances in which the young lady found herself placed were as difficult as they were urgent. Indeed, it was one of those positions in which a very decisive and almost desperate step could alone be taken. And such a step did Lady Florina make up her mind to adopt.

Composing her feelings as well as she was able, the young lady descended again to the drawing-room. Her object was to learn, in the course of conversation, what were her aunt's plans for the evening. This was soon ascertained. Lady Macdonald was engaged to a whist-party at an old dowager's in the same square, and Florina therefore perceived, with inward satisfaction, that the evening would be entirely at her own disposal, for Lady Macdonald was by no means likely to require her to accompany her to an " old people's party."

Hours passed away, hours full of poignant suspense and a torturing anxiety for the poor young lady. Never had an afternoon appeared so long, never had the foot of time seemed to be so heavy. Talk of time having wings and flying fleetly! He had none then for Florina. By one only incident was the monotony of that afternoon relieved, and this was an incident that enhanced to a harrowing degree the young lady's affliction. It was when Deveril's well-known knock sounded at the front door, and Florina almost immediately

afterward heard that door closed with an unusual degree of violence. Good Heaven! the outrage was consummated — if an outrage it were. Because if Deveril were really unfaithful and inconstant, and if Lady Saxondale's story were strictly true, then was it no unmerited outrage, but a well-deserved punishment.

The dinner-hour arrived, and Lady Macdonald, who was one of those persons that dwelt long upon a particular topic and reverted often to it, talked the whole time about " the overweening insolence and laughable coxcombry of that upstart Deveril." And poor Florina was compelled to sit and listen, and not merely to listen, but also to veil the feelings which this constant harping on the same sensitive chord tried so cruelly. Yes, she had to conceal her emotions from her aunt and from the domestics in attendance; but as she caught herself blushing and turning pale a dozen times in a minute, she trembled to the lowest confines of her being at the fear of being detected. That dinner was one of the cruelest ordeals through which she had ever passed, and never was relief more gratefully welcomed than when Lady Macdonald retired to dress for the whist-party, and Florina thus found an opportunity of seeking the solitude of her own chamber.

Unlike the Honourable Misses Farefield, Lady Florina Staunton had no confidential lady's-maid. She had two lady's-maids, but with neither of them was she accustomed to converse in a manner calculated to lessen her own dignity in their eyes, or diminish the respect which they experienced toward her. For, considering the sphere to which she belonged, Lady Florina was assuredly one of the most artless, unsophisticated, and ingenuous creatures in existence. Therefore, while she invariably treated her dependents with the utmost affability and kindness, never even making them feel their menial condition, she at the same time avoided anything that savoured of undue familiarity. Whatsoever secrets her heart might cherish were treasured up in the sanctity of that chaste tabernacle, and thus was it that Lady Florina had no confidante in the general acceptance of the term.

The consequence was that she now felt herself involved in a perplexing and embarrassing position. She was anxious to go out for a couple of hours, and she did not choose the

household to be aware of the circumstance. How was she to manage? Though in the purity of her heart hating and scorning anything that bordered upon duplicity, she now found herself reduced to the necessity of scheming somewhat in order to accomplish her purpose. After a little deliberation, the young lady decided how to act. She waited till her aunt had taken her departure to the house where she was to spend the evening, and then Florina rang the bell of her own private chamber. Her principal lady's-maid, whose name was Sophia, immediately answered the summons, and Florina said, " I feel so unwell this evening that I mean to lie down for an hour or two. Do not let me be disturbed until I ring for you."

Sophia, suspecting nothing, promised to obey her young mistress's orders, and withdrew. It was now close upon nine o'clock, and Florina, putting on her plainest and simplest apparel, an unpretending straw bonnet with a veil, and a dark shawl, glided down a back staircase and succeeded in issuing unperceived from the house, there being a means of egress from the rear of the premises. We should add that she had locked the door of her own suite of apartments and had taken the key with her.

On foot did the young lady proceed to the Regent's Park, which, for the behoof of persons unacquainted with London, we may observe is at no very great distance from Cavendish Square.

As she went on her way, Florina was several times on the point of turning back. She felt that in one sense there was some impropriety in the step she was taking, — that of a single young lady visiting a single young gentleman, and such a visit being paid at such an hour; but then she thought to herself that, after everything that had occurred on the previous day between herself and Deveril, it was a duty she owed to her own feelings as well as to those of that individual to suffer no unnecessary delay to elapse ere she had an explanation with him. If all the worst should be confirmed, he surely would not aggravate the present evil of his conduct toward her by boasting elsewhere that he had received such a visit; and if he were enabled to defend himself completely against the allegations of Lady Saxondale, he would rejoice and be grateful for the step Florina was now taking. Thus the young lady found more arguments to

induce her to continue her way than to make her retrace her steps.

She entered the Regent's Park, and in a short time drew near the mansion where she had passed the previous evening. She stood for a few moments gazing up at the balcony whence she had waved her handkerchief to Deveril, and as her heart swelled almost to bursting and the tears started from her eyes, she said to herself, " Is it possible that within a few hours after making a declaration of love to Lady Saxondale he could have been guilty of such a hollow hypocrisy as to seek this spot in the hope of being enabled to catch a glimpse of me? But there is a strange, an unnatural contradiction in all this, and the longer I think of it, the more irresistibly am I led toward the conviction that William is true to me, and that Lady Saxondale has either been grievously mistaken or guilty of a wilful misrepresentation."

Inspired by these thoughts, and cheered with the fervid hope that they would soon receive the fullest confirmation, Florina pursued her way in the direction of the pretty little villa where William Deveril dwelt. For during their conversation on the preceding day he had informed her of the place of his private abode, and as she was well acquainted with all the environs of the fashionable neighbourhood of the Regent's Park, she had no difficulty in finding her way to the young artist's dwelling.

It was a small but neat and genteel residence, situated in a somewhat secluded spot, beyond the boundary of the Regent's Park, and presenting a very picturesque appearance. As she came in sight of the villa, Florina felt her heart beat with quickening palpitations, and on reaching the iron railings which enclosed the front garden she was again seized with an access of hesitation and uncertainty whether to proceed. But she had come thus far, she had reached the place of destination, she had passed through the loneliness of the park, and should she now retreat at the very last moment? Should she tremble at the accomplishment of her purpose? No, her mind was speedily made up again. She opened the garden gate, and threading the gravel walk, which was embowered in evergreens, she advanced up to the front door. It stood open, for the evening was close and sultry. A lamp burned in the hall, but there were no lights in the front parlour on the ground floor. The casement of this room was

open, and voices issuing from within reached Florina's ears. One of those voices was Deveril's, the other was that of a female, and the very first sounds which the young lady caught struck her as laden with accents of tenderness and endearment.

A sickening sensation seized upon her; the demon of jealousy again raised its voice in the depths of her soul. She felt as if she were standing on the threshold of a revelation that was to bring a blight upon her heart. Transfixed to the spot she stood, unable to lift her hand to touch the bell or the knocker of the door, unable also to advance a step to pass that open portal, unable likewise to make known her presence in any shape or way. She was thus deprived of the power either to advance or retreat. Instinctively did she listen; she could not help it, no matter what amount of impropriety characterized her conduct, no matter how indiscreet a part she was playing. Of all this she thought not; it struck her not that she was doing wrong, — indeed, she was incapable of serious or deliberate reflection of any kind. Those sounds of voices which she had caught had struck her, we said, as being laden with an unmistakable tenderness, but the words themselves had not reached her ears. Now she listened with suspended breath to catch what was being said, as if her whole life's happiness or misery depended upon the result.

" But, my dearest William," murmured the female voice which she had already heard, and whose tones were of silvery softness, " you must tell me what has occurred, for you know how sincerely I love you."

" Wherefore," — and it was now the voice of Deveril that was speaking — " wherefore will you thus insist that I am dull and melancholy? "

" Oh, because, my beloved William — " and the remainder of the sentence was breathed in so low a tone that the sense of the words was lost to the listening Florina.

" My sweet girl, do not shed tears on my account," said Deveril, in the most soothing and endearing accents. " Come I must not see you mournful and melancholy like this. While we have been sitting in conversation here the darkness has gathered around us, the twilight has gone, dusk has succeeded. Shall we ring for lights, or ramble in the garden for half an hour? "

"Whichever you please, dear William," responded that soft and silvery female voice. "Oh, how your brows throb! There, let me push back your hair, dear William, from over your forehead. Ah! I am sure that you have experienced annoyances this day. Your hand is hot and feverish. Let me kiss your cheek. Ah, that is burning too! Come, dear William, we will walk in the garden a little, for the air in this room is hot and stifling."

All this while Florina was still transfixed to the spot, a prey to the most torturing sensations. Who could this female be? That she was young, the silver melody of her voice sufficiently proved; that she was beautiful, Florina's jealousy naturally prompted. But, ah! a sudden hope flashed to the young lady's mind. Might not this female be Deveril's sister? And yet, no; for he had never spoken of a sister, and if he possessed one, surely he would have alluded to her in the long and familiar conversation which he and Florina had held on the previous day? No, no, she could not be his sister. Then who was she? Oh, for a jealous heart to ask itself that question, what possible answer could be returned? What response could the fevered imagination suggest? The hope which had sprung up an instant back was annihilated immediately, almost as soon as it was formed, and poor Florina felt as if she must scream out in frenzy or sink down in senselessness.

But they were coming forth to walk in the garden, William Deveril and his female companion. Florina must retreat, she must vanish from the scene where she felt convinced that she had a rival in the young artist's love. But ah! her feet are still nailed to the spot, she could not stir, it was a terrible crisis in her thoughts and sensations, and if her very life depended upon it, she could not at that instant have moved a limb. Suddenly the parlour door opened, and Deveril came forth with his female companion into the hall. His arm was thrown around her waist, and her fair hand lay lovingly upon his shoulder. But, heavens! who was the beauteous creature that thus, half-locked in William Deveril's fond embrace, met the view of the dismayed and anguished Florina?

It was Angela Vivaldi, the opera-dancer!

A wild cry thrilled from Florina's lips, the spell which had retained her transfixed statue-like to the spot was suddenly

lifted, and, as if seized with a mortal terror, she fled precipitately.

" Who is it? What does this mean? " exclaimed Deveril, as he rushed forward in pursuit of Florina, whom he had not recognized, because she was veiled, and because also the glimpse he had caught of her just outside the front door in the dusk of the garden was so partial and so brief.

But, as if inspired by a panic-terror, the young lady flew away from the spot where it would have seemed pollution and contamination now to linger, and she relaxed not her speed until, exhausted and breathless, she had regained the carriage road inside the Regent's Park. Then, finding that she was not pursued, she flung herself on a bench and gave way to the violence of her grief.

That flood of tears relieved her so far that she now became capable of deliberate reflection, and wiping her eyes, she said, aloud, " This weakness is unworthy of me. What, I bestowed my heart's purest and sincerest affection upon one who is the unworthiest, the most deceitful, as well as the most profligate of men! Good heavens, is it possible that so much perfidy and wickedness could be concentrated in one so young and apparently so ingenuous? Ah! rude indeed are the teachings of this day, bitter the experiences which within a few brief hours have shed their light upon my soul! I am older by many years in knowledge of the world than I was when I rose from my couch this morning. But enough of these reflections. Let me behave with becoming fortitude, let me stifle this affection in my heart, let me banish his image from my mind."

Then, as if to outstrip her harrowing thoughts, Lady Florina rose from the seat and began walking hurriedly along the road through the park; and though she felt her heart swelling as if it were about to break, and though the tears kept flowing afresh from her eyes, yet she struggled with all her strength to subdue another outburst of the grief that was thus convulsing her. Her dream of love was over, a sad and terrible change had taken place in her mind, the world's roses were all withered to her view, earth's choicest flowers were scattered, blighted and dead, in her pathway, existence stretched before her like a barren waste, and the poor girl felt that she had now nought worth living for.

It was about eleven o'clock when Florina reached the house

in Cavendish Square, and she succeeded in effecting her entrance unperceived by any of the inmates. Her absence, thanks to the precaution she had taken, was not discovered; and on gaining her own apartment she really felt as she had described herself to her lady's-maid two hours back, namely, exceedingly unwell.

CHAPTER XXXI

A NIGHT ADVENTURE

It was about twelve o'clock on the same night of which we have been writing in the previous chapter that Chiffin the Cannibal emerged from the Edgeware Road, and crossing Oxford Street, entered Park Lane. But instead of immediately pursuing his way, he stopped short, looked up and down, and not perceiving the person whom he expected to meet him at that spot, he gave vent to a deep imprecation, muttering likewise, " If he don't come, I'll make him repent it the next time I meet him, hang me if I don't! "

Fearful of encountering a policeman, the Cannibal walked a little way down Park Lane, and then turned back; but when he found that the person whom he awaited did not make his appearance, a deeper and more terrible imprecation denoted the ruffian's ferocious rage.

In order to avoid attracting any inconvenient notice, his bludgeon was concealed beneath his loose, shaggy coat, and he kept as much as possible in the deep shades of the place where he was now loitering. For it was a clear, bright night, and, moreover, the street-lamps in front of the mansions in Park Lane gave forth a light which rendered it all the more necessary for him to observe the utmost caution.

" Perhaps he thinks because it's a fine night I shouldn't do the trick," muttered the Cannibal to himself, " but he's no business to have any opinion of his own in the matter. For the job of getting into a strange place without a confederate inside, and no put-up affair, I rather like a clear night. One sees better how to go to work. Some cracksmen always do their business in the dark, and though it's a good rule on most occasions, it isn't always to be followed. But here's Tony, after all, blow him! "

The reader will remember a certain individual named Tony Wilkins who belonged to the gang that infested Agar Town and made Solomon Patch's house their headquarters. This Tony Wilkins was the person whom Lady Bess had especially chosen to be the bearer of the small sealed packet which she had ordered him to deliver to a gentleman at King's Cross, and we have described him as a young man of about four and twenty, clad in a squalid garb, and with a countenance as sinister in its expression as that of any one of his wonted companions. It was this same Tony Wilkins for whom the Cannibal had been waiting, and who now at length made his appearance.

"Well, what the deuce has made you so late?" said Chiffin, in a growling tone.

"Late! It's on'y just midnight," was the response, "and you told me as how I was to be here as the clocks was a-striking twelve, didn't yer?"

"They have struck twelve at least ten minutes ago," returned the Cannibal.

"Well, ten minutes more or less," observed Wilkins, "isn't no great thing. Von can't be quite so particular."

"Yes, but what was the use of keeping me trudging about here at the risk of being twigged by the blue-bottles? Howsomever, we won't lose any more time. So come along."

"To tell yer the truth, Chiffin," said Tony, clutching the Cannibal by the arm, "I don't over and above like this here affair. You say you've never been inside the premises, that you don't know nuffin about 'em, that you ain't got no pals among the slaveys —"

"But I know that there's plenty of swag to be got, and so I suppose that's enough," interrupted Chiffin, fiercely. "Why, here you are as down in your luck as you well can be, and here am I ready to take you by the hand and put a good thing in your way."

"All right, Chiffin," exclaimed Tony. "If you're so deuced sure of the business I suppose it's all safe. So here goes, and I'm the man to second you, old feller."

"But I tell you what it is, Tony," growled the Cannibal, as he fixed his reptile-like gaze upon his companion, "if so be you feel afraid, say so at once, and there's an end of the matter, 'cause why, I don't like dealing with cowards."

"Come, Chiffin, none of this here sort of talk with me!"

exclaimed Wilkins, angrily. "I'm no coward, but I don't want to run my neck bang into a noose. You know deuced well I ain't afeard; I never wor afeard of nuffin in my life. Fear and prudence is two wery different things, I takes it. If so be you was to see a mad bull a-thundering along this here lane, I s'pose yer wouldn't go and grapple him by the 'orns, would yer? Not you, indeed; you'd precious soon bolt a von side. Well, then, that's prudence. But if so be he comed right up and 'tacked yer, then I knows wery well you'd let fly at him with yer club in a jiffy. Well, then, that's walour."

"Do hold your jaw, Tony, and come along," growled the Cannibal. "There, I'll go on in front, and you foller at a distance. Slip bang around the second turning to the left, and you'll find me a-waiting."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin the Cannibal walked rapidly on, Tony Wilkins keeping in his track, but at an interval of about fifty yards. They encountered no policemen in their way. The truth is, there very seldom are policemen to be found on their beats in that fashionable region between the hours of eleven and one, those officials being either at some public-house which keeps open all night, or else supping cosily with the female domestics in the kitchen of some mansion where dancing and card-playing are going on upstairs in the drawing-rooms. Thus was it that Chiffin the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins passed on unmolested, and the former halted at a side door in a garden wall, where he was speedily joined by his confederate.

"Now, hush, and 'tis all right," whispered Chiffin, as he flung a rope over the wall; and the iron grapnel which was at the end of the cord caught against that part of the masonry which overhung the side door.

The rope was thus retained fast, and Tony Wilkins, being the lighter and more agile of the two, clambered up the wall by means of the rope. In a moment he disappeared on the other side, and drew both the bolts of the door, while Chiffin managed the lock by means of a skeleton key. Thus the Cannibal, who was too heavy and clumsy to climb the wall, which was a tolerably high one, obtained prompt admittance into the garden at the back of Saxondale House, for this was the mansion where the present burglary was being effected.

"All seems as quiet as a workus," whispered Tony Wilkins,

as he and his leader carefully surveyed the rear of the buildings. " There isn't never a light in none of the rooms, and not so much as a mouse a-stirring."

" Let's try this door, then," said the Cannibal.

" Or that there windy, eh? " suggested Tony.

" No, the door," was Chiffin's prompt answer, for his experienced eye at once showed him, by the aid of the moonlight, that the door presented the readiest and easiest means of effecting an entry.

From a capacious pocket in the lining of his shaggy coat, he drew forth a small saw, thin as a watch-spring, keen as an array of shark's teeth, and flexible as a Castilian stiletto blade. With a gimlet he speedily made a hole in the lower part of the door, near where he calculated the bolt must be, and, thrusting the saw into the hole, he cut out a circular piece, leaving an aperture large enough to introduce his hand. He was thus enabled to feel for the bolt and draw it back, — a process which was instantaneously accomplished.

The door was high, and there was nothing for Chiffin to stand on to reach the upper part of it. He accordingly made Tony Wilkins go down upon all fours, and, standing on his back, he went to work again. Another gimlet-hole was made in the higher portion of the door, the little saw, well moistened with oil, was assiduously plied again, and another circular piece of wood, large enough to afford an opening for the hand and wrist, was soon cut out. The upper bolt was thus felt for, and drawn back, and Chiffin descended from his human footstool, — such a purpose Tony Wilkins having served, but not without experiencing some degree of pain in his back, as Mr. Chiffin was by no means the lightest person in the world.

The reader will now understand that the two bolts of the door were drawn back, but the door itself was locked. It was a stout door, and Chiffin dared not attempt to break it open with a crowbar, on account of the noise that would be made by such an operation. There was no keyhole visible on the exterior side, and thus he had no immediate indication of the position of the lock inside. But this difficulty was speedily overcome. Again ordering Tony Wilkins to go down upon all fours and make himself into a foot-stool, the Cannibal mounted on his back once more, and then, with a piece of string and a leaden bullet at one end he proceeded

to sound for the lock, just as a sailor at sea sounds with a cord and plummet to ascertain the depth of the water. Thrusting the leaden bullet through the hole that had been cut for the removal of the upper bolt, Chiffin gradually let out the string until the bullet was stopped by the top of the lock which projected from the inner side of the door; then keeping the string tight between his finger and thumb, so as to mark how much of it had been let go through the hole, he drew it back. To measure the outside of the door from the hole downward was now the work of an instant, and thus Chiffin discovered with the nicest exactitude the position of the lock. He next proceeded to bore with his gimlet, and having made a hole through the wood, his little flexible saw was again put into requisition. In less than a quarter of an hour he had cut completely round the lock and the door opened to his thrust.

" Now, Tony, come gently," he said, and they entered the premises together.

All was dark within, and all was silence likewise, at least down in the lower region of the premises. A dark lantern was quickly produced from Chiffin's capacious pocket, the candle inside was lighted by means of lucifer matches with which he was also provided, and the two burglars commenced their survey of the place. They first entered the back kitchen, and as the Cannibal pointed to the iron bars which protected the windows, he said, in a whisper to his companion, " I told you as how it wouldn't do to try the game on there. The opening of a shutter would have been nothing, but those iron fences would have given harder work than you or I should have liked to try. All these kind of houses have got gratings to the lower windows. It isn't the first time I have broke into a house in this part of the world. But there's nothing in this back kitchen worth looking after. So come along. It's the butler's pantry we must try, mate."

With these words Chiffin led the way out of the back kitchen, and soon found a door which was fast locked, but which he immediately concluded to be the one communicating with the place he was in search of.

" Hold the light, Tony," he said, " and I'll get to work again with the tools."

This time he tried the effect of a small crowbar upon the door, which, being of far lighter make than the one by which

the burglars had entered the premises, seemed to warrant this mode of dealing with it. Chiffin, we need hardly say, was an accomplished hand in using the crowbar for such purposes, and made little noise in the process. The door speedily yielded, a few more efforts, and it was broken completely open. The burglars passed into the place, which, as Chiffin had anticipated, proved to be the butler's pantry. But infinite was their disappointment when, after searching in every cupboard, they found no plate there.

" This is deuced provoking," growled the Cannibal, in a ferocious manner.

" Cussed mean of the people of the 'ouse to take their plate up to bed with 'em," remarked Tony Wilkins. " It ain't giving a poor devil a fair chance," he added, with the look of a man who fancied that he was cruelly wronged. " What's to be done now? "

" What's to be done? " echoed the Cannibal, in a voice which resembled the subdued grumblings of a hungry tiger, " why, hunt about for the swag till we find it, to be sure. And if a throat or two is to be cut in the search, what matters it? "

" Nuffin at all," responded Tony Wilkins. " Lead on, old feller. You seems to know your way as if by instinct, as they say of the 'osses."

Chiffin the Cannibal passed out of the butler's pantry, and proceeded into the front kitchen, but nothing worthy of his predatory views was found there. Thence the burglars proceeded into the servants' hall, where some four or five stray silver forks and spoons, which the butler had doubtless forgotten to count up along with the rest of the plate, were lying about.

" This is summut, at all events," observed Tony Wilkins. " It cheers one on to look arter more."

" Now, then, keep that cursed tongue of yours still, and pull off them great heavy boots of yourn," said Chiffin, " or else do as I do, if you have got the things to do it with."

And what was it that Chiffin the Cannibal was now doing? Nothing more nor less than drawing on a very coarse pair of lamb's wool socks over his own thick and heavy lace-up boots. This being done, he took a pair of pistols from his pocket, saw that each had a percussion-cap ready for service, and, handing one to Tony Wilkins, bade him only use it in

case of extreme desperation of circumstances, but then not to hesitate an instant.

The two burglars now began ascending the stairs, Chiffin walking first with his muffled feet, and Tony Wilkins with his naked ones; for the latter was carrying his boots in his hand, and as for stockings, his wardrobe was not extensive enough to permit him the enjoyment of such luxuries. He however hoped to improve and replenish it by the proceeds of his share of the present night's plunder.

The marble hall was reached, and from this point, the same as from the lower regions, it appeared that a profound silence reigned throughout the house, for it was now past one in the morning, the operations at the back door having absorbed at least three-quarters of an hour. The parlours opening from the hall were visited by the intruders, and though they abounded in many fashionable knickknacks, objects of virtu, beautiful ornaments, and the usual decorations to be found on the mantelpieces and side-tables of apartments in the houses of the rich, there was not much in those rooms that would suit the purposes of the robbers. A few things, however, they did consign to their pockets, and emboldened by the freedom from interruption and the absence of all alarm which they thus experienced, they began the ascent of the magnificent marble staircase leading to the drawing-rooms and state apartments. In the first of these which they entered, they found a gold watch lying upon the table, and there were many little ornaments scattered about which they knew Solomon Patch would purchase, and to which they therefore freely helped themselves. Thence they passed into the adjacent room, but as they entered it with as much caution as possible, they stopped suddenly short on beholding a light at the farther extremity. It shone through a door which stood half-open at the end of the large apartment they had just entered.

The burglars stopped short, we say, and Chiffin instantaneously closed the blind of his dark lantern. But the two men did not retreat; they stood and listened with breathless attention. If they had heard voices in conversation they would have held it time enough to make the best of their way from the premises, but if they heard no voices, they would then be encouraged to traverse the room which they had entered and see who was in the next one, in which

case they might be enabled by threats or violence to compel any person whom they would thus find to give information relative to the whereabouts of the plate, jewels, money, etc. Such were the thoughts that simultaneously occurred to the two burglars, for all men of that class act as it were upon a particular system, and pursue a course which is as much guided by previous experiences as by the occurrences which transpire at the moment.

For several minutes did they listen, and they heard no one speak. Then they traversed the spacious apartment with as much caution as possible, and the thick carpet would have stifled the sound of their footsteps even if the feet of one had not been muffled and the boots of the other taken off. On reaching the door which stood half-open, Chiffin peeped in, and beheld a lady seated alone in the adjacent room. She was placed at a table and had a book open before her, but she was not reading. She was reclining back in her chair, and as the light of the wax candles fell with a sort of Rembrandt effect upon her splendid features, it was easy to perceive that she was absorbed in a profound reverie. Nor were her reflections of the most pleasing description, for there was a lowering of the naturally high and noble forehead, there was a sinister light gleaming in the eyes to which so magnificent a lustre properly belonged, and there was a compression of the lips which nature had never intended to remain so firmly closed.

This lady was none other than the mistress of the mansion, and Chiffin knew her to be Lady Saxondale. He had seen her first of all upwards of nineteen years back, when, being despatched by Ralph Farefield into Lincolnshire, he had lurked about the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle watching for an opportunity to carry off the child; he had seen her then, in the pride and glory of her youthful beauty, and once seen, she was not a woman who could be easily forgotten. But Chiffin had also seen her within the last few days, for he had loitered about Saxondale House in Park Lane, not only with the view of discovering as much as he could of the position of the premises, but also to examine the features of the domestics and see whether the physiognomy of any one of them furnished a sufficient indication of innate villainy to warrant the Cannibal in scraping acquaintance with the view to an arrangement

for a burglary. In this hope he had been disappointed, but while thus loitering about, he had seen Lady Saxondale go in and out of the mansion. He had recognized her as the same beautiful woman he had seen in Lincolnshire nearly twenty years back, and thus was it that he at once knew her now, as peeping through that half-opened door he beheld her seated in a mood of deep abstraction at the table.

A glance rapidly flung around the room where Lady Saxondale was thus observed at once showed the Cannibal not merely that she was alone, but likewise that there was no other door open by which any sudden cry of alarm to which she might give vent would issue forth. He therefore resolved upon taking a desperate step in order to reap a handsome harvest from his present enterprise; and making a sign for Tony Wilkins to stop where he was for the instant, the Cannibal passed stealthily into the room.

So deep was Lady Saxondale's abstraction, that she perceived him not. Her looks were fixed on the book which lay open before her, but she saw not the pages themselves, — all her faculty of vision was as it were turned inward with the absorbing nature of her meditations. For Lady Saxondale had this night experienced no inclination to retire to rest. The image of William Deveril appeared to haunt her. She loved him, and she hated him at one and the same time. She feared that she had taken a false step and compromised herself seriously, in having made the round of all her acquaintances and friends during the day and promulgated her story relative to that young man. Cunningly devised as the tale was, she trembled lest the refutation which Deveril would give when it reached his ears might obtain credit; and thus, though great was the satisfaction she had experienced at the time, not only in torturing Lady Florina, but likewise in propagating the same scandal elsewhere, she was now apprehensive that the blow she had endeavoured to deal might rebound upon herself. In short, her feelings, having been unnaturally excited during the day, had since experienced a proportionate reaction, and conscience, which " makes cowards of us all," was not permitting Lady Saxondale to be an exception to that rule.

Besides, she was not only fearful that the tangled web she had been thus weaving would in the long run enmesh herself, but she was tortured with the pangs of jealousy

toward Florina. What was she to do in respect to her whom she thus regarded as her rival? Even apart from that hatred which the spirit of jealousy had suddenly made her experience for Florina, how could she possibly permit the engagement to continue between her son and that young lady? And yet, on the other hand, upon what pretext could she break off the engagement? Altogether, Lady Saxondale's position was one of apprehension, bewilderment, torture, and perplexity, and in addition to the circumstances connected with Deveril and Florina which had thus combined to make her wretched, there were others which struck their viper stings into her heart.

This is not, however, the time nor place to analyze at any great length the feelings and thoughts of Lady Saxondale. The little which we have just said upon the subject was merely for the purpose of accounting for why she had not as yet sought her couch, and wherefore we find her seated alone in that abstracted mood and at so late an hour of the night, or, rather, at so early a period of the morning. In the depth of her disagreeable meditations it was no wonder that she observed not the presence of Chiffin the Cannibal; and as he, by making a short circuit in the room, was enabled to steal as it were close up behind her before she was aware of the intrusion, it was with a sudden start and a horrible access of terror that she felt a hand suddenly laid upon her shoulder.

Wildly she sprang up, and on beholding herself confronted by that hideous-looking wretch, a scream was about to burst from her lips, but it was stifled, ere it broke forth, by the suddenness with which the Cannibal exclaimed, "Silence, or you are a dead woman," and a pistol, gleaming in his hand, was presented close to her forehead.

For an instant Lady Saxondale was paralyzed with terror, but her naturally strong mind almost immediately regained its self-possession, and she said, in a voice that was strangely calm under such circumstances, "Remove that weapon; I will not create an alarm."

Tony Wilkins now made his appearance, and Lady Saxondale, perceiving that there were two ruffians, and thinking it quite probable that there might be even more, felt that anything like resistance would be altogether vain, and that if she attempted to raise the household her life

"SHE FELT A HAND UPON HER SHOULDER."

"SHE FELT A HAND . . . UPON HER SHOULDER"

Photogravure from original by Merrill

would be inevitably forfeited. For it was impossible to glance even for a single instant at Chiffin the Cannibal's countenance, without reading in its hideous lineaments the most bloodthirsty propensities and a brutal capacity for mischief.

" Well," he said, pointing the muzzle of his pistol downward, but not putting it away from her sight, " you seem an uncommon brave lady, and so I suppose you are just as prudent a one. Therefore we shall have no nonsense in dealing with you."

" What do you require? " asked Lady Saxondale. " But that question I need scarcely put: your looks bespeak your errand. You see I treat the matter with frankness, and therefore there is no need to keep that weapon in your hand in so threatening a manner."

" How uncommon nice she speaks, don't she? " said Tony Wilkins, in an undertone, as he sidled up to his companion.

" 'Cause she's a lady of sense and knows what's what," observed Chiffin, aloud. " Now, ma'am, please to tell us which would be most convenient — to let us walk off with the plate and jewelry, or for you to pay us over such a handsome sum that we shall go away happy and contented with our night's work, and be able to drink your ladyship's health every day for the next six months? "

" Finding myself completely in your power," returned Lady Saxondale, at the same instant flinging a quick and scarcely perceptible glance toward the mantelpiece, as if looking for some object, " I should prefer giving you a sum of money. But I must tell you beforehand that I have not much in the shape of gold about my person, and should have to go to my own chamber to fetch the amount that you may require."

" And how much," demanded Chiffin, " may your ladyship happen to have in your own chamber? "

" Perhaps four or five hundred pounds altogether," returned Lady Saxondale, after a few moments' consideration.

" That's little enough," observed Chiffin. " And, now, how much in the purse? "

Lady Saxondale, who still preserved her presence of mind with an astonishing calmness, drew forth her purse from

a reticule which hung at the back of the chair, and, handing it to Chiffin, said, " Count its contents for yourself."

" Eleven sovereigns, two ten-pound notes, one five, and some silver," said the Cannibal, as he emptied the contents of the purse into his hand. " Well, but all this is a poor lot. The family plate must be worth ten times as much. What's to prevent us cutting your throat, ma'am, and then ransacking the place for ourselves? "

" The plate is in the butler's own room," was Lady Saxondale's calm and collected response. " He sleeps in the same corridor with the other male domestics of the household. His door is no doubt locked, and if you attempted to force it, an alarm would be raised. A dozen men servants, most of them for a certainty possessing loaded weapons, would be upon you."

" Her ladyship speaks like a book," whispered Tony Wilkins. " Take the blunt; it will be a deuced good night's work."

The Cannibal slightly turned his head toward his companion to hear what he had to say, and during the few brief moments his eyes were thus averted from Lady Saxondale, she again swept her own glances with lightning quickness toward the mantelpiece, and a scarcely perceptible gleam which flitted over her countenance might be regarded as an indication that she had discovered the object for which she had twice searched. The lady's sweeping glance was so rapid, and that gleam on the features was so transient, that it was a wonder Chiffin observed either. But he did, nevertheless, for ere completely turning his looks again toward Lady Saxondale, he glanced at her from the corners of his eyes; for there was altogether something in her calm self-possession, in her fortitude and coolness, which had made him suspect that she was contemplating some stratagem to effect a turning of the tables against himself and companion.

" Well, ma'am," he said, with no alteration in his own voice, look, or manner, " me and my pal is agreed to take the blunt, — or saving her presence, the money, — and we mean to be satisfied. But of course we can't let you go by yourself to your own room, 'cause why, it's certain sure you would come back with a posse of servants at your heels."

"I did not for an instant suppose," rejoined her ladyship, "that you would trust me out of your sight. My chamber is at no great distance hence, and easily accessible. One of you can proceed thither."

"Well, that looks reasonable enough," remarked Chiffin, "because one of us will in that case stay to keep guard upon you. I say," he continued, turning toward his companion, "you shall act the part of sentinel. Here, take my clasp-knife, hold it open in one hand, and keep the pistol in t'other. Don't be afraid to use 'em if need be. Keep your eye on her ladyship's face the whole time, — it's a pleasant face to look at, — and if you see the least inclination on her part to cry out, don't hesitate to give her a knock over the head with the butt-end of the pistol, or slit her windpipe with the cold steel."

"Trust to me," replied Tony Wilkins, as he received from the hand of his companion the clasp-knife which this latter produced from the capacious pocket of his shaggy coat.

For an instant — and only for an instant — did Lady Saxondale seem to quiver with a cold shuddering at the horrible instructions which Chiffin thus gave his companion, and which instructions he purposely elaborated in this cold-blooded manner in order to convince Lady Saxondale that it was no child's play and that any trickery on her part would cost her her life.

"Now, ma'am," continued the Cannibal, "if you'll just be so good as to give me all necessary directions, I'll take the liberty of proceeding to your ladyship's chamber. But mind, I warn you beforehand, that if you think of throwing me in the way of any of your flunkies, or sending me into an ambush, I'll plant a bullet through the brains of the first that dares to lay a hand upon me. And mind you, if my friend here, who is going to act the part of sentinel, hears my pistol fired in any other part of the house, he'll instantly fire his own, and it'll be to settle your ladyship on the spot. For look you, ma'am, if we're nabbed, we may just as well swing for half a dozen things as for one or two."

"You might have spared all these threats," remarked Lady Saxondale, still with an extraordinary coolness and presence of mind, "because I feel that I am powerless in

your hands. As a matter of course, if I were able, I should frustrate your designs, but I repeat, I am powerless, and therefore I am making the best of the matter and effecting a compromise with you."

"Go on, then, with the directions which you were going to give," said Chiffin, "for there has already been enough time wasted."

"You must issue forth by that door," said Lady Saxondale, pointing to one at the farther extremity from that by which the burglars had entered the room; "you will then find yourself upon a landing with a staircase before you. Ascend that staircase, and the first door on the right hand opens into my private chamber. This key," continued Lady Saxondale, indicating one upon a bunch of five or six, "opens a chest of drawers in that chamber, and in the second drawer from the top you will find the money of which I have spoken, lying loose in one corner. I have nothing more to say."

All the while she was thus speaking, Chiffin the Cannibal fixed his eyes keenly upon Lady Saxondale's countenance; but he saw nothing therein to confirm the suspicions which had been excited in his mind. He therefore resolved to run the risk of the adventure, for though he had appeared to grumble at what he pretended to regard as the small amount of money which was forthcoming, he was secretly pleased at the idea of obtaining such a sum, inasmuch as a booty in the shape of ready cash rendered him independent of old Solomon Patch; and moreover it was a very dangerous experiment to pass through the streets of London with a large quantity of plate in the possession of a suspicious-looking individual.

"I suppose there's no light where I am going," he observed, "and therefore I'd better take one of them wax candles."

"Yes, you had better," returned Lady Saxondale.

"But I say, though," observed Chiffin, again hesitating as a sudden idea struck him, "suppose any of your ladyship's maids was about, which is more than likely, as you yourself are sitting up — "

"I dismissed them to their chambers long ago," returned Lady Saxondale, "and I do not think you incur the slightest risk of encountering a soul."

"If I do, ma'am," rejoined Chiffin, with a terrible scowl of his hideous features and a savage glare of his reptile eyes, "it will be the worst for you. Now, mate," he added, to his companion, "keep a sharp lookout on her ladyship, and if you hear any suspicious noise you'll know what to do."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin the Cannibal took up one of the wax candles from the table, and quitted the room by the door which Lady Saxondale had indicated. But as he issued forth, he closed the door in such a manner that, while it appeared to the inmates of the room to shut, he did not really allow it to do so, but he suffered it to remain about an inch ajar, and then, instead of immediately continuing his way to Lady Saxondale's private chamber, he stopped to listen, setting down the wax candle at such a distance from the door and in such a position that it threw no light into the room.

But why did the Cannibal adopt all these precautions? Why did he remain and listen? Because, notwithstanding Lady Saxondale's countenance had remained inscrutable in its self-possession during the whole of the latter portion of the discourse, yet still Chiffin's mind was filled with doubt and misgiving. That very self-possession on her ladyship's part appeared, the longer he reflected upon it, to be but a mask for some deep treachery. In short, Chiffin fancied that she had purposely sent him on this errand with the knowledge that he would fall into some snare the nature of which he himself could not however conjecture, and that in the meantime she would endeavour to extricate herself from the custody of Tony Wilkins. He therefore resolved to listen for a few minutes, and if Lady Saxondale remained perfectly quiet and gave no indications of treachery either by word or deed, Chiffin might then in all confidence pursue his way to her chamber.

For at least a couple of minutes after he had quitted the room, Lady Saxondale remained perfectly silent as to speech and tranquil as to movement, while Tony Wilkins stood close by the chair in which she was seated, the pistol in one hand, the open clasp-knife in the other, and his eyes intently fixed upon the splendid patrician lady whom he was thus watching. Seeing everything remain thus favour-

able, the Cannibal was about to steal away from the door and ascend the staircase, when Lady Saxondale began to speak, so that Chiffin's feet remained riveted to the spot, and he continued to listen with suspended breath.

" I feel such a faintness coming over me," were the words which thus began to flow from Lady Saxondale's lips, and which were addressed to Tony Wilkins, " that I must beg you to reach me that scent-bottle which stands on the mantel. It is the one with the silver top, and is next to the timepiece."

She spoke in a faint and languid voice, and appeared to be sinking back in the chair. Tony Wilkins gave no immediate answer; he hesitated how to act. At length he said, " Well, ma'am, I don't want to act harsh, leastways not cruel, but I can't part company from yer. If so be natur' isn't so much exhausted that you can drag yourself up to the chimneypiece, I'd rayther it should be done that way, and then I could walk by your side."

" I will endeavour," murmured Lady Saxondale, still more faintly than before, and rising from her seat, she advanced slowly and with every appearance of feebleness, and tottering in her gait, toward the mantel.

Tony Wilkins kept so close to her, and held his weapons in such evident readiness to use them, that Chiffin, who observed all that was passing from the doorway, felt perfectly satisfied with the conduct of his companion, yet he was well convinced in his own mind that this was nothing but a stratagem on the lady's part for the purpose of consummating some treachery.

" Don't go too near the bell-pulls, ma'am," said Tony Wilkins, who evidently had his misgiving also, " 'cause why this here clasp-knife is terribly apt to dig itself right down into an arm when stretched out to ring a bell at a time when the flunkies and slaveys isn't exactly wanted."

" I had no intention of the kind," responded Lady Saxondale, and taking the bottle from the chimneypiece, she, still with slow and tottering gait, retraced her way to her seat.

" Well," thought Chiffin to himself, " she meant no harm, after all, but I suppose these fine ladies can't get on without their scent-bottles, any more than a chap like me can without his gin. But I'll just stay a minute or so longer,

and then if she says nothing more, I shall consider it's all right."

Lady Saxondale resumed her seat, and sank languidly back in the chair, Tony Wilkins still remaining close by her side, and still preserving a vigilant watch over her. She took from the table her snowy white pocket-handkerchief, which was elaborately embroidered all along the hems and worked with a coronet in each corner. Then, still with languid movements, she unscrewed the silver top which covered the glass stopper of the bottle. We should observe that the bottle itself was a small one of cut glass, and contained a white fluid instead of the crystallized salts usually seen in scent-bottles. Tony Wilkins naturally thought this white fluid must be some very delicious perfume; when, however, Lady Saxondale drew out the glass stopper, the odour emitted by the fluid was by no means of an agreeable taste, but, on the contrary, was pungent, powerful, and unpleasant. That Lady Saxondale herself entertained a similar opinion appeared to be indicated by the circumstance that while pouring a little of this white fluid upon her pocket-handkerchief she held both handkerchief and bottle as far away from her nose as possible. Then she hastily put in the glass stopper again, and placed the bottle on the table, but in so doing, she dropped the handkerchief.

" Pick it up for me," she said, in a very faint voice, and she now looked as if she were going off in a swoon.

Tony Wilkins really and truly believed that such was the case, and while in a very guarded manner, so as not to be taken unawares, he stooped down and picked up the handkerchief, he said to himself, " I'm hanged if this is gammon; it's her nerves as does it, I suppose." He accordingly picked up the kerchief with the hand that held the pistol, and was about to present it to her ladyship, when the latter said, in a tone of affable condescension, " You are welcome to smell it if you like. The perfume is of a rare character."

By a very natural and mechanical movement, Tony Wilkins applied the handkerchief to his nose, but scarcely had he done so when an overpowering sensation seized upon him with the suddenness of a lightning flash, he gave one gasp in an abortive effort to cry out, handkerchief, pistol, and clasp-knife fell from his hands, and he dropped down upon the carpet as if stricken dead with apoplexy.

" Now for the alarm," ejaculated Lady Saxondale as she sprang up from her seat.

But at the same instant she heard the sudden rush of footsteps, and, glancing around in affright, she found herself confronted by Chiffin the Cannibal, whom she had supposed to be by that time busily engaged in plundering her bedchamber.

The hideous rage of ten thousand demons appeared to be gathering in his infuriate looks, as he aimed a tremendous blow at Lady Saxondale with the bludgeon which he had taken from underneath his coat; but she avoided it by instinctively sinking on her knees, and stricken dumb with terror, she extended her arms in mute appeal for mercy. Had she not thus abruptly fallen down to that suppliant posture, there would have been an end of the brilliant and magnificent Lady Saxondale then and there.

" Make a noise, and, by Satan! I'll do for you," growled the Cannibal, in a deep ferocious tone, and he again raised his bludgeon menacingly.

" No, no, I will not say a word," murmured Lady Saxondale, whose fortitude appeared to have all given way. " But spare my life — do not kill me — for God's sake do not kill me! "

" That all depends," was the Cannibal's brutal response. " Come, get up from your knees, but don't speak louder than a whisper, and don't move without my telling you, or I'll make devilish light work of it, you may be sure. Now then, what have you done to my mate here? Is he dead? "

" No, no, not dead — only stupefied," answered Lady Saxondale. " He will come to himself again presently."

" So much the better for you," said the Cannibal. " A pretty kind of a woman you are, to be able to play such a precious tricky part."

" Was it not natural? " observed Lady Saxondale, now somewhat regaining her self-possession.

" Oh, don't bother like that," interrupted Chiffin fiercely. Then, as he gazed down upon the prostrate and motionless form of Tony Wilkins, his look grew serious as if he were revolving something of importance in his mind. " By jingo, after all," he suddenly exclaimed, " I'm deuced glad this business has happened. It's given me an idea. 'Pon my soul, I'm uncommonly indebted to your ladyship! Why,

robbing will become quite an easy matter, with nothing like risk in it, if so be you've told me true that this here stuff," and he pointed to the phial upon the table, " takes away the senses just by smelling it. And now, ma'am, please to tell me how a person is to be recovered? "

" The individual will presently revive naturally," answered Lady Saxondale, " and if not, by shaking him, sprinkling water on his face, and the usual means adopted in cases of swoon — "

" Oh, if that's the case, then we'll try the experiment," said Chiffin. " But mind you, ma'am, stay where you are, don't budge an inch, or — "

And without finishing the sentence, he pointed his pistol at Lady Saxondale. Then kneeling by the side of Tony Wilkins, and all the time keeping the pistol still pointed at the lady, he gently shook his prostrate companion. With a deep gasp Wilkins began to revive, and in a few minutes he completely recovered his senses, though he experienced a heavy and oppressive feeling about the head.

All this while Lady Saxondale remained standing in the middle of the room, on the very spot where she had previously knelt, for the pistol continued to be levelled at her, and she had already seen enough of the desperate and determined character of Chiffin the Cannibal to be warned how she trifled with him. Unperceived by her ladyship, and while kneeling down by the side of Tony Wilkins, Chiffin gathered up the white handkerchief, which was impregnated with that powerful and stupefying essence, and tucking it partially up his sleeve and holding the remainder in his hand, so that it was altogether concealed from her ladyship's view, he rose up from his kneeling posture.

" What's all this here mean? What's been done?" asked Tony Wilkins. " I feels all no-how — "

" Nothing has been done as yet. You remain quiet and recover yourself, while I finish talking to her ladyship — "

" Ladyship indeed! she's a witch," muttered Tony Wilkins, angrily, " to be able to knock down a chap with a ankercher in this here way."

" Now, ma'am," resumed Chiffin, accosting Lady Saxondale, " about this money business. But I say," he exclaimed, with a sudden start, " who's that coming in? "

Instinctively did Lady Saxondale look around, and at

the same moment the white cambric handkerchief — her own handkerchief — was thrust up to her face. The scream that rose to her lips was stifled ere it found vent by the sudden paralyzation of all her faculties and senses, and she dropped down upon the floor in the same way as Tony Wilkins had ere now fallen.

When Lady Saxondale became aware of returning consciousness, the glimmering of dawn stealing into the room through the curtains was mingling with the light of the wax tapers that had nearly burned down to their sockets; and as her ladyship's reminiscences gradually settled themselves in her brain, she looked around in the dread anticipation of beholding the hideous forms of the burglars. But she found herself alone. Raising herself up from the carpet — but painfully and feebly, for she experienced a heaviness in the head and a languor all over her form — she threw herself upon a sofa, pressed her hand to her throbbing brows, and then reviewed everything that had taken place. Rising again from the sofa, she approached the table to take a wax light, and she observed that the bottle of powerful essence was gone. She looked on the mantel, she looked all around the room, but it was not to be seen. In the course of this survey, rapid though it was, she soon discovered that a great number of articles of value had been taken away, and now for the first time she perceived that her own person had been plundered, — her rings had disappeared from her fingers, her watch, necklace, and other ornaments had all vanished.

She now, in great trepidation and alarm, hurried away from the room, and sped to the chamber of one of the lady's-maids. There she aroused the sleeping domestic with the startling intelligence that the house had been broken into, and the other servants were speedily called up. In a few minutes all was bustle and confusion, together with no small amount of dismay. Lord Saxondale's valet was sent to his master's room to arouse him, while Mary Anne was despatched to the Misses Farefield's apartments to tell them what had happened and bid them not be frightened. In the meantime Lady Saxondale, with four or five of her female dependents, repaired to her own bedchamber. The burglars had disappeared, but from the confusion which prevailed in that room, it was evident that it had been com-

pletely ransacked. All the ready money in her ladyship's drawers, amounting to about the sum she had mentioned to Chiffin, her jewelry, comprising her costly diamonds, and numerous other articles of value, had all disappeared.

We need not dwell at much greater length upon the sequel of this night's adventure. It is, however, necessary to record a few more particulars, and first to observe that Lord Saxondale's valet was compelled to return to his mistress and report (what indeed he had all along known) that his young master had not been in during the night. As the reader has doubtless anticipated, the burglars got clear off long before the alarm was raised, for Lady Saxondale had remained a considerable time in a state of stupefaction. Her account was, for she chose to say nothing about the essence in the bottle, that she had sat up to read a very interesting book, when she was suddenly startled by the presence of two ill-looking men, from one of whom she received a blow with a bludgeon that struck her down senseless. Such being the version she rendered, she could not for consistency's sake give anything like a minute description of the personal appearance of the ruffians.

The searching investigation that was instituted throughout the house a few hours later showed that several of the apartments had been entered and robbed of many articles of value; while the condition of the back door leading into the garden indicated plainly enough the means by which the burglars had obtained admittance. Information was of course at once given to the police, and two experienced "detectives" were speedily on the premises. The first glance which they gave at the back door enabled them to pronounce with confidence that it was no "put-up affair;" in other words, that none of the servants of the establishment were in league with the robbers, the entry having been effected by forcible means from without, and through no succour from within. Lady Saxondale was requested to give as minute a description as she could of the burglars; but all she deemed it prudent to say was that one appeared to be a rough-looking man with a shaggy coat and a white hat with a black band, and that the other was a thin, squalid individual, beyond which she could give no more satisfactory details.

But this account, meagre though it seemed, was sufficient to put the detectives on the right scent with regard to one of the burglars, whom they both unhesitatingly pronounced to be Chiffin the Cannibal. With respect to the other, they could form no conjecture.

CHAPTER XXXII

DOCTOR FERNEY

The gentleman whose name stands at the head of this chapter was one of the most eminent, but at the same time one of the most eccentric physicians in London. He occupied a very large mansion in Conduit Street, Hanover Square, yet his household establishment was on a very limited scale. Indeed, he kept only four domestics, entertained very little company, and lived in the plainest and simplest manner. But he tenanted so large a habitation because he required ample space for a museum of curiosities which he had been collecting for more than twenty years, and which consisted of objects connected with the medical, surgical, and physiological sciences. Mummies from Egyptian pyramids, human relics dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii, corpses which he had obtained from the body-snatchers and had embalmed with his own hands, the skeletons of individuals who, having died in the workhouses or hospitals, presented examples of extraordinary malformation, monster children preserved in glass bottles, figures in waxwork representing the appearance and ravages of the most virulent diseases which afflict humanity, — in short, a host of objects of this class and character were gathered in a suite of chambers at Doctor Ferney's house.

To these rooms the domestics very seldom penetrated, for it was confidently reported that the house was haunted, and that the spirits of some of the deceased persons whose embalmed bodies or fleshless skeletons had found a place in the doctor's museum were frequently seen gliding after dusk through those dismal and awe-striking chambers. Not even in the broad daylight would the housemaid venture

alone into the museum to sweep away the dust. The female servants, when this duty was to be performed, invariably went two together, and all the time they were engaged in cleansing the place, they would keep in close companionship, as if this near contiguity could effectually guarantee them against the presence of apparitions.

And truly, the museum was no very cheerful spectacle for persons of weak nerves or timorous dispositions. The Egyptian mummies, in their manifold swathings, with their shrivelled countenances resembling baked leather, and standing upright in the coffin-like boxes with glass lids; the modern corpses, embalmed by the doctor's own hand, wrapped in shrouds, and with their yellowish, marble-looking faces, their dull, glassy eyes wide open, their teeth gleaming between the pale lips slightly apart, and having a somewhat lifelike look, though hideous and ghastly, as they also stood upright in their tall narrow cells fronted with glass; the skeletons with every bone perfect, and articulated all over, suspended against the walls in such a manner that they seemed to stand upright of their own accord; the skulls that were ranged in rows upon the shelves and seemed to look down with their eyeless sockets and to grin in mockery with their lipless mouths; the monsters and abortions preserved in glass bottles of different sizes, some of these monsters being children with two heads to one body, others with one head to two bodies, and so forth; then the waxen effigies large as life, and disposed in various attitudes, some as if reclining on sofas, others standing upright each with an arm ominously extended, and all displaying upon their fleshlike surfaces the appearance of some loathsome, ravaging, and corroding disease, — such an assemblage of horrible and ghastly objects was indeed but too well calculated to scare those persons who could not look upon them with a coldly scientific eye.

In addition to his museum, Doctor Ferney had a laboratory, — not, however, for alchemical purposes; he being no believer in the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life, but for purely chemical experiments and the legitimate objects of a true science. The doctor devoted a great deal of his time to the pursuits of his laboratory, and many curious discoveries did he make, and many valuable eliminations accomplish. Few of these, however, did he give forth

to the world. He was a man who cared nothing for fame; devotion to his studies had rendered him somewhat misanthropic, and in pursuing these studies with such insatiate ardour, it was not to form for himself a grand reputation, nor to confer blessings upon his fellow creatures by adding to the lights of science, but simply, and we might almost say selfishly, to gratify his own individual thirst for knowledge. In this respect he resembled the bookworm who pores over mystic volumes, ferrets out mouldering manuscripts, deciphers hieroglyphics, and devotes years and years to the rectification of some particular date or the clearing up of some dubious point in history, but who after all keeps his discoveries to himself, devours his learning in secret, revels in solitude upon the literary treasures which he thus amasses, and allows not the world at large to benefit by the results of his perseverance or to share in the fruits of his labours. Of precisely such a character was Doctor Ferney, and yet he had not been enabled so completely to conceal his light under a bushel that none of its rays peeped forth. Some few of his discoveries had transpired in various ways, yet when he had seen them recorded in print, accompanied with high eulogiums upon himself, he experienced no emotion of pleasure, no inward triumph, no feeling of satisfaction.

Nevertheless, such a man could not help becoming famous to a certain extent, though he himself sought not after fame. As a physician he grew eminent, and he was diligent in the exercise of his professional duties, not for the sake of reputation, but because he thereby acquired ample revenues. But wherefore did this man, so frugal in his habits, so humble in his domestic economy, so completely dissevered from every pursuit which the world calls pleasure, and with no family cares or claims to make him wish for riches, — wherefore, it will be asked, did such a man covet much gold? Because he expended large sums in the prosecution of his favourite avocations. He thought no more of giving a thousand guineas for a mummy than a wealthy aristocrat would in purchasing a race-horse; and if he read in any foreign journal of some extraordinary object in natural history existing at such-and-such a place, he would instantaneously despatch a trusty agent to procure the same, no matter at what price. Thus, for instance, he had in his

museum the skeleton of a Russian giant seven feet seven inches high, who had died a few years back in Siberia and whose remains the doctor had purchased of the man's relatives (through his trusty agent) for a considerable sum. He had also the body of a German dwarf, only two feet six inches high, and who had lived to a very advanced age. This corpse, which was preserved in spirits of wine, Doctor Ferney had also purchased of the deceased pigmy's friends at the time of his death. But it would be impossible to enumerate the various curiosities of this ghastly nature which Doctor Ferney had succeeded in procuring. Enough has however been said to enable the reader to form an idea of the perseverance with which he pursued the bent of his taste, and the large outlays which were needed to gratify it.

He was a man of about forty-five years of age, and from his earliest youth had given indications of this singularity of genius and disposition which with the lapse of years was destined to show such remarkable developments. Of middle stature, thin, pale, and with a countenance that in every line and lineament denoted deep thought and continuous study, Doctor Ferney was not one of those men who are calculated to win the female heart. Without being at all repulsive, he still was very far from prepossessing. He was unmarried, and, of all beings in the world, seemed the most likely to continue so. Yet this man, of such strange tastes, such profound devotion to the mysteries of science, and of such misanthropic habits, had not only loved, but still cherished in the depths of his soul the image of her who many years back had made so indelible an impression on his mind. His love had not been reciprocated; years and years had elapsed since he had seen its object, and yet the passion remained deep and unextinguishable in his heart. No one knew that he had thus loved, save and except the being on whom that love had been bestowed; no one thought him capable of loving, and to this supposed incapacity was the circumstance of his unwedded condition assigned. Yet in the solitude of his own study, in the secrecy of his laboratory, and even in the mystic silence and loneliness of his museum, would the memory of his love come stealing upon his mind like a perfumed cloud over Araby's sandy dreariness; and the bright and beautiful image which had inspired

the sentiment would rise up before his mental vision like a mirage of enchanting delight amidst the trackless sands of the desert. His was a strange heart to cherish such a feeling, but it existed there nevertheless, — a rose blooming on the side of a barren rock.

Such was Doctor Ferney, the eminent physician of Conduit Street.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and the doctor was seated in his study, poring over a volume on some abstruse subject, when his footman entered to announce that a lady requested an immediate interview. The physician inquired her name, for he was not accustomed to receive visits from females at that hour, but the domestic replied that the lady had said her name was of no consequence, as she was a stranger to Doctor Ferney, but that she entreated the favour of an audience if it were only for a few minutes. The physician accordingly bade the servant introduce the lady to the study, and the lackey quitted the room for the purpose.

In a couple of minutes the man returned, escorting a lady closely veiled. The footman withdrew, shutting the door behind him, and the doctor placed a chair for the lady's accommodation. She was handsomely dressed, but in a manner which seemed to indicate a motive for disguise. The dark veil was folded thickly over her features, and she retained it with one of her hands in such a way as to keep it in its proper position, so as effectually to conceal her face. She was tall and of a finely developed figure, and though from her manner she appeared somewhat agitated and nervous, yet there was in her gait and gestures a certain dignity mingled with elegance that denoted the well-bred female.

Doctor Ferney knew not how it was, but a strange kind of trouble gradually stole over him, an instinctive feeling that there was some unknown link between himself and this lady who came so mysteriously, — a vague and undefined presentiment that despite what she had said to his footman, she was not entirely a stranger to him. So powerfully did these feelings gain upon the physician that he found himself unable to put such questions as might elicit the lady's object in visiting him; and the clouds which enveloped his presentiment slowly fading away, it seemed

as if his comprehension grew clearer and that a ray of light was dawning in more brightly upon his soul. He trembled, his heart began to palpitate even with violence, and he experienced the mystic knowledge that behind the dark veil was a countenance which he had seen before and which had remained indelibly impressed upon his memory.

The shallow reasoner and the superficial observer may ridicule this idea of the physician entertaining such a presentient knowledge of who his visitant was, even before she had lifted her veil or given utterance to a word, but the fact is perfectly consistent with the natural course of things. For there are such mystic promptings of the mind, such strange and unaccountable foreshadowings, such truthful but inexplicable revealings, and the thoughtful portion of our readers will not dissent from the assertion. Has it not happened — ay, and often too — that when a young man and a young woman have been introduced to each other for the first time, there has arisen immediately and at once in their souls the instinctive feeling that they were destined for each other? And this recognition of the ideal that each had formed relative to a future partner for life has been thus mutual and simultaneous. "'Tis she," murmurs the secret voice in the soul of the man. "'Tis he," simultaneously whispers a like mysterious voice in the soul of the female. And thenceforth their destiny is accomplished, even as it had been foreshadowed ere they had ever met. Again, when one man has been introduced for the first time to another, there has arisen in the secret depths of the heart a sudden feeling of liking or aversion between the two, and the conviction that they have been predestined to exercise a powerful influence for good or for evil upon each other. We might multiply such illustrations to an endless amount. They are facts beyond dispute, and whatever may be the nature of the mysterious essence which thus subsists between mind and mind, and whatever be the origin of those strange presentiments, their power cannot be denied. Analagous therewith was the presentient knowledge which on the present occasion made Doctor Ferney aware who his visitant must be, even before he had acquired any positive certitude upon the subject.

Doubtless the lady herself observed the trouble and agitation which thus came over the physician, for she at

length broke silence by saying, " Is it possible that you already suspect who I am? "

" Ah, that voice! " ejaculated Doctor Ferney, and for nearly a minute he seemed overpowered by the emotions which those flutelike sounds excited still more strongly and vividly within him.

Slowly did the lady speak again, and now she said, " Yes, Doctor Ferney, I am that same Mrs. Smith who lodged with your mother nineteen years ago, and who — But I need say no more to recall myself to your memory."

" No, no, for I had not forgotten you. It was impossible I could have forgotten you," exclaimed the physician, with a singular vehemence. " Nineteen years have passed, you say? Yes, I know it — I have calculated those years with perhaps a greater exactitude than yourself. But pardon me," he observed, suddenly interrupting himself, " you must think that I am talking strangely? "

The lady did indeed think so; at all events she was astonished to hear him speak in those fervid accents, and give utterance to such words, the reason and meaning of which, however, she could not fail to understand. For at the far back date which had been mentioned, — namely, nineteen years ago, — she had been aware that Ferney loved her. She knew at the time that she was the object of his enthusiastic adoration, but she could not possibly suppose that this love of his had survived the lapse of time, and that at the expiration of so long a period she should hear him speak and behold him look in a manner which indicated that the flame of his passion had not been extinguished within him.

" You do not answer me," he said, after a brief pause. " Is it possible that I have offended you? "

" No, no; how could you give me offence? " exclaimed the lady, now proffering him her right hand, but still retaining the veil carefully folded over her countenance with the left.

" Madam," said Doctor Ferney, as he took that proffered hand and pressed it in his own, which trembled violently, " I am rejoiced that I have not offended you. It is not my fault if I have thought of you often and often — yes, very, very often — during the long interval that has elapsed since last we met. Then I was young, and not wrinkled, nor emaciated, nor careworn in looks, with hard study and

unwearied pursuance of the lights of science, as I am now. So that you must find me much altered. Though not many years past the prime of life, yet am I prematurely old — But you," he suddenly exclaimed, " cannot be so much altered as I am. And yet you conceal your countenance. Wherefore do you remain thus closely veiled? But no matter. I see before me that countenance as I beheld it in the glory of its beauty nineteen years ago, and if on raising that veil you were to reveal a face as much marred by the ravages of time as mine is, yet should I not behold it as it may now appear, but as I first saw it and as my memory has treasured it up."

" Is it possible," murmured the lady, evidently agitated and bewildered, " that you have thus continued to think of me during this long interval of time? "

Doctor Ferney did not immediately answer the question, but after a long pause, which seemed to be filled with deep and mournful reflections, he said, in a low voice, " I never loved any one save you."

" And have you never once seen me, nor even fancied that you have seen me, since we parted at your mother's residence nineteen years ago? " asked the lady, and through the deep folds of the veil her eyes seemed to shine brightly as they were fixed with keenest scrutiny upon the countenance of the physician.

" No, not once," answered Doctor Ferney. " Do you reside in London? Or have you occasionally visited the metropolis? But pardon me, I was wrong to ask those questions. From the past I am well aware that circumstances of mystery attend upon you, though Heaven knows that sooner than breathe a word from my lips calculated to do you an injury, I would lay down my life to render you a service."

" Generous-hearted man! " exclaimed the lady, once more proffering him her hand. " Little did I expect such a reception. Methought that my image must have long years ago passed out of your memory, and that though perhaps you might now and then think of one circumstance which you cannot very well have forgotten, yet that it was regarded as a mere straw floating upon the great ocean of the past, and without importance or power sufficient to add one single ripple to your pathway over the waters of life."

"Not so — not so," responded Doctor Ferney, as he pressed the lady's hand between both his own. "The feeling that I experienced for you when you dwelt so many years back beneath my mother's roof — that mother who is long since dead — has never faded away from my heart. I may tell you this now, because I am an old man and my words can have little influence upon you or your destinies."

"Doctor Ferney," was the lady's response, "after all the generous words you have spoken to me, and after declaring that you would rather lay down your life to do me a service than breathe a word to do me an injury, it would be wrong — it would be ungrateful — were I to treat you with such mistrust as to retain my veil over my features. Besides, you say that my countenance is impressed upon your memory — "

"Yes, indelibly," exclaimed the physician. "But it would be a happiness which I had never dared anticipate to behold it once again."

The lady slowly raised her veil, and an expression of mingled delight, admiration, and surprise came upon the countenance of Doctor Ferney. So little had time changed the beauty of those splendid features that it appeared to him as if the lapse of nineteen years had not taken place, that it had been all a dream, and that he saw her now as he had been wont to see her when at his mother's residence. For that lapse of time, while maturing the beauty of this magnificent woman, had only seemed to add to the glory and the splendour of her loveliness. There was perhaps less of youthful softness in her looks, but the light of her eyes had not waned, the raven darkness of her hair had not paled nor lost its gloss, the richness of the red had not withered on the lips, nor the evenness of the flesh become indented with a single wrinkle.

"'Tis the same — the very same," murmured the physician, in accents that were only just audible. Then passing his hand over his eyes, he said, "Is it a dream — a delicious dream — or is it a reality? It is a reality. I cannot doubt it," and once more did he appear so overpowered by his emotions that he looked as if almost about to faint.

"And during this long interval," said the lady, repeating her former question with an evident anxiety to receive the

confirmation of the former response, "you have never once seen me?"

"No, never once," returned the physician. "By the nature of the query I must of course suppose that you either dwell in London or visit it frequently; but even if you are constantly riding or walking abroad it would not be surprising that we have never met, for I go out so little, never into society, only to visit the patients who cannot come to me, and in those professional rounds I am whirled rapidly along in my carriage, for my time is so precious. Then, even when thus flying about in my carriage, my attention is ever fixed on some book which I take with me; so that seldom is it I gaze forth from the window of the vehicle, and thus, if every day you pass me by, I should not see you. But let me again beseech and implore that you will experience no mistrust in me. Good heavens! I am incapable of injuring you, and even if I were capable, I know not that I have the power. For with reference to that incident to which I need not allude more pointedly, I scarcely understood its meaning and purpose at the time, and assuredly I feel no inclination to fathom it now. Whatever mysteries be yours, keep them, cling to them, and rest confident that so far as I am concerned they are safe. You have conferred upon me too much happiness by thus permitting me to gaze upon that countenance again, not to inspire me with the liveliest gratitude in addition to any other sentiment I may have experienced toward you."

"And are you not surprised to receive a visit from me?" asked the lady.

"Yes, and yet not altogether surprised, for without being able to explain it even unto myself," continued the doctor, "I must inform you that there has often arisen in the depths of my soul a presentiment that we should one day meet again. But observe, this presentiment has not been accompanied by hope. I never was wildly enthusiastic nor drivellingly foolish enough to anticipate that the feeling which my heart has cherished would ever be crowned with happiness. Yet I felt, as I have said, that we should meet again, and I now rejoice that we have thus met. Such is the tone and temper of my mind that when you depart hence, no dreariness nor dismalness will be left behind you; but on the contrary, the light of your transient presence will appear

to linger within these walls and cheer me on my way. You see that I can speak rationally and calmly upon this subject, as becomes my years, and as becomes perhaps the position of her whom I am now addressing. For that you were not what you seemed when dwelling at my mother's residence, I felt assured; and that yours is no plebeian nor middle grade, I am equally confident now. But who you might have been I never sought to know, and who you are I purpose not to inquire at present. Those are your secrets, and they are sacred in my estimation. Besides, I have no undue curiosity; mine is a disposition of another stamp. But pardon this long speech. All I have said is merely to inspire you with the necessary confidence to induce you to explain the purpose of your visit; for that you have an object in coming to me this evening, I must of course conclude."

"Doctor Ferney, you are a man of too much sense," replied the lady, "for me to dream of flattering or complimenting you so emptily — so transparently — as by a declaration to the effect that I came hither for the mere purpose of reviving the friendship of former days. No, it was a purely business matter that brought me hither; and, as I ere now said, little did I anticipate so kind, so generous a reception. I fancied that we should meet almost as strangers, but it has proved otherwise, and I have therefore the less difficulty in explaining my purpose. Do you recollect that when you had your little house in Islington, at a time when you could scarcely foresee the eminence to which you were destined to rise, and which has enabled you to move to this fashionable quarter of the town, — do you remember, I ask, that you had a little laboratory opening from your private sitting-room up-stairs?"

"When I removed from that house," replied Doctor Ferney, "it cost me many a pang to do so, because you had visited me there. Ah, can I forget that laboratory? Do I not remember that one entire morning was passed with you there? And you seemed to take so deep an interest in the various experiments I showed you — Oh, it was that which emboldened me at the time to throw myself at your feet and declare how much I loved you!"

"And you remember also," continued the lady, "that there were two or three of your experiments in which I was

so much interested that I besought you to give me written descriptions of the several processes, and you did so."

"And those receipts, have you preserved them? Have you ever thought any more of them?" asked Doctor Ferney, with a glow of pleasure upon his countenance.

"I have preserved them, I have amused myself on several occasions with the experiments themselves, and I can assure you," added the lady, with a sweet smile, "that I have fulfilled the instructions with a success that you yourself, as my preceptor in the science, would have viewed with satisfaction. Do you remember that one of those receipts was for a peculiar compound fluid which yourself had just succeeded in discovering?"

"Yes, and the discovery of which Liebig has just claimed as his own," added Doctor Ferney. "But no matter; the credit was mine, if any there were. You mean chloroform?"

"The same," answered the lady. "Well, I now come to the object of my present visit. A bottle of this subtle fluid has been stolen from me. It has fallen into the hands of persons whose desperate characters I have too much reason to know, and I dread lest the most fearful uses should be made of it. Therefore have I lost no time in coming to make you acquainted with this circumstance. For to tell you the truth, I feared that if such evil uses as I anticipate should be made of the fluid, and that you heard of any such case, you might at once, on the impulse of the moment, declare that some years back you had communicated the secret to a lady, and that from her only could the dangerous elimination have been procured. Under such circumstances I might become seriously compromised, — for carelessness, at the least, — for from what you told me at the time I thought it very improbable you would ever communicate the secret to another — "

"Ah! I recollect," exclaimed Doctor Ferney, "I said that inasmuch as you had taken so deep an interest in that discovery, it should remain sacred on your account; so that I might have the satisfaction of thinking to myself that there was at least one being in the world whose smile of approval had gladdened me in my scientific pursuits."

"It was because you spoke thus," rejoined the lady, "and because I read at the time the generosity and sincerity of your character that I felt assured they were not

idle words you had uttered. Therefore, when the phial of fluid was purloined from me last night, I said to myself, ' If it should really be the case that to me only in the world has Doctor Ferney entrusted his secret, I now stand a two-fold risk. In the first place, should an evil use be made of the fluid by the hands into which it has fallen, and if he comes to hear of it, he may proclaim to the world that from a certain lady could the subtle essence alone have been obtained. Or else, in the second place, he will perhaps ascribe direct to me whatsoever crime may be perpetrated, and it would be terrible to suffer thus in the estimation of any one.' These were the terms in which I reasoned to myself, and therefore, in anticipation of whatsoever may ensue from the loss of my phial of chloroform, I resolved upon paying you this visit."

" I am glad — I am rejoiced," replied the doctor, " that the incident has occurred, since it has procured me the happiness of your presence. But what would you have me do? In what way can I assist you? Speak, you can command me in all things."

" Should you hear of any case in which the villains who have stolen the fluid make an evil use of it, you will pass the matter over in silence, you will take no step that shall lead to further investigations? Will you promise me this, doctor? " asked the lady.

" I will, most faithfully and most readily," replied the physician. " Is this all that you require? Is this all that I can do? "

" I have nothing more to ask," rejoined the lady. " And now, Doctor Ferney," she said, rising from her seat, " I must take my leave. But one word," she exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck her. " If perchance," she continued, in that winning way which women know so well how to adopt toward those over whose hearts their charms have power, " should we ever meet in the great world, it must be as simple acquaintances, almost as strangers; and not a word from your lips will suffer others to know under what circumstances we met long years ago, — much less for what purpose."

" Have I not already told you," asked the doctor, in a mildly and mournfully reproachful voice, " that I would sooner die than do you an injury. Relative to that purpose

of which you speak, I have so far buried it in oblivion that it remains entombed at the bottom of my soul. Did the Inquisition exist now, and rear its hydra-head armed with all its terrors in the very heart of England, not even all the tortures of the rack should drag forth that secret from me. It is yours, not mine."

"Generous man that you are! accept my warmest, sincerest, most heartfelt thanks. And think not that, though nineteen years have elapsed since last we met, I have been unmindful of your welfare. I have watched you from a distance, I have seen you rise to eminence, and I have been rejoiced. If I did not send you my congratulations, it was because — But no matter. I congratulate you now, and with a fervid sincerity."

"But you will not leave me thus abruptly?" said the physician. "You, who were interested in my little laboratory at Islington, will surely condescend to cast a look within the walls of the larger one which I possess in Conduit Street? And you remember, too, that nucleus of a museum which I had formed, also in Islington, — a small closet containing a few curiosities, with difficulty purchased by the hard savings of those times? Well, the little nucleus in the small closet has grown and expanded into a large collection, filling a suite of four chambers within these walls."

"Yes, I will with pleasure visit your laboratory and your museum," returned the lady, who was evidently anxious to render herself agreeable to the physician, as an additional inducement for him to keep inviolable the several secrets with which he appeared to be entrusted.

"Come, then," said Ferney, and taking a lamp off his reading-desk, he led the way from the study.

Crossing a landing-place, the physician guided the lady along a passage to a door which he threw open, and she soon found herself in the laboratory. We need not pause to describe in detail the appearance of this place. The imagination of our readers can easily depict the shelves covered with jars and bottles duly labelled with the chemical hieroglyphics, the furnace in one corner, the alembics, retorts, and other implements which lay scattered about, the bookcase containing several curious volumes, and the table in the middle, crowded with phials filled with fluids of all colours and qualities, saucers containing crystals, and the

other results of a wondrous science perseveringly pursued by one of its most ardent disciples.

The lady, after examining the various implements with great apparent interest and curiosity, turned toward the table, and inspecting the phials, asked several questions relative to their contents. Doctor Ferney, who for years had never been excited by any tribute of praise or any personal homage shown to his scientific genius, was now perfectly overjoyed at the interest which the lady seemed to take therein. But then he loved her. He had worshipped her image for those long, long years, and she was now present with him in the living reality. He explained to her one after another the natures and uses of the various fluids contained in the phials; and at length taking up one which she herself had not noticed, he said, "Here is a liquid of so deadly a poison, that I am even surprised at my own indiscretion in leaving it here. It is fortunate, however, that my servants possess no undue curiosity, and never penetrate to my private rooms without previous orders. Indeed, the foolish creatures declare that they are haunted," added the doctor, with a smile.

"But this remarkable poison of which you began to speak," said the lady; "is it also a new discovery of yours?"

"It is an elimination which I succeeded in obtaining but yesterday," replied Doctor Ferney. "There is no poison so fatal in existence. It needs not even so much as a drop poured down the throat. The point of a feather dipped therein and placed with the gentlest touch upon the lip would produce instantaneous death. The peculiar property of the fluid is that it is inodorous as it is likewise clear as water."

"And wherefore this deadly, this terrible discovery?" asked the lady. "What purpose can it serve?"

"Not that to which I may have seemed to allude," replied the physician, again smiling, for he experienced a rare happiness in the company of the object of his undying affection. "But by means of this fluid, used infinitesimally with large admixtures, I have no doubt of accomplishing some wondrous cures. Let us now pass on into the museum," and thus speaking, Doctor Ferney placed the little phial containing the deadly poison on the edge of the table.

He now took up the lamp once more, and was leading

the way out of the laboratory, when there was a sudden crash and a sort of stifled shriek on the part of the lady. Doctor Ferney turned hastily around, and on perceiving what it was, he besought her not to vex herself on account of the accident.

"Oh, how awkward, how careless on my part," she cried, with an air of the utmost annoyance. "It was the fringe of my shawl that swept all these phials from the table."

"No matter! no matter!" said the physician. "Pray do not blame yourself."

"But the fruits of your labours," she exclaimed, looking down at the quantity of broken glass and the pool of liquid on the floor.

"Again I say no matter," persisted the physician, who was annoyed only on the lady's account, for he appeared deeply vexed.

"But the phial containing the deadly poison?" she observed. "That, I fear, was amongst them."

"Still no matter," rejoined Doctor Ferney. "It perhaps serves me right for leaving it about in so negligent a manner. Come and let me show you the wonders of my museum."

The lady accordingly followed him from the laboratory, and as she did so, she took the opportunity of thrusting into her bosom something which she had held in her hand.

They now ascended a flight of stairs, and on reaching the landing above, Doctor Ferney opened a door which led into the suite of apartments containing the various objects of physiological curiosity, anatomical preparation, and waxen effigy, to which we alluded at the opening of this chapter.

"Here," said the doctor, as he held the lamp before an array of skulls upon a shelf, "are the heads of many celebrated criminals, procured — no matter exacty how. To the lover of the phrenological science each head tells its own peculiar story, and, without previous knowledge, affords a certain clue to the reading of the history of the individual to whom it belonged. The very crimes which the wretches perpetrated and for which they suffered are distinctly evidenced by the construction of their skulls. Now, here," continued the doctor, carrying the lamp to the front of a mummy in its case, "is an Egyptian princess dug out of the Pyramid of Cheops. This one next to it is the petrified form of a male slave found in a kitchen belonging to a palace in Her-

culaneum. It was dug out from amidst the lava, which had preserved instead of destroying it. See that iron chain upon the leg; it was the badge of servitude. Here, in this next case, is a corpse which, to tell you the truth, I procured from the resurrection men several years ago. Ah! I used to be a good customer to them, when bodies could not be so easily obtained as they can now. This furnishes the result of an experiment of mine in embalming. See how admirably it is preserved. Does it not seem as if the individual had only died yesterday? But while I think of embalming, I can show you another specimen. That also I procured from the body-snatchers; and, by the by, it is just about nineteen years ago, shortly after our acquaintance in London ended and you quitted my mother's abode. Business called me into the country, and there I purchased this subject which I am about to show you. It seems he was drowned. He must have been a very fine young man, and I flatter myself that it is the most successful experiment I ever made in the process of embalming. Here, this way."

Thus speaking, Doctor Ferney led the lady into the adjacent room, and there, advancing close up to a tall coffin-looking case, which stood upright on one end, and with a glass front, he pointed to its inmate, saying, " This is the one."

The lady, though naturally of strong mind, had contemplated with some degree of cold horror the various objects hitherto pointed out; but, as already stated, it suited her purpose to manifest as much interest as she was able in the things that constituted the doctor's favourite studies. She now advanced up to this fresh object of curiosity to which Doctor Ferney had alluded; but what words can depict her horror, astonishment, and dismay, when she thus found herself as it were face to face with Ralph Farefield?

For the doctor's visitress, as the reader has doubtless all along known, was none other than Lady Saxondale.

Yes, there stood Ralph Farefield, looking as if he had not been dead a day, apparelled, too, in a befitting suit of raiment; for thus was the doctor accustomed to clothe his subjects, so as to give them a lifelike appearance. Yes, there was Ralph Farefield, gazing with his artificial eyes of glass, forth from his coffin-case, upon the horror-stricken

Lady Saxondale. Fortunate for her was it that utter consternation paralyzed her voice and for the moment struck her dumb; fortunate, too, was it that a massive table was near, against which she supported herself as she staggered back; fortunate also was it that Doctor Ferney had his own eyes turned toward the corpse at the time; for had it not been for all these circumstances, Lady Saxondale would have screamed out, would have sunk down upon the floor, and would have betrayed the terrible emotions so suddenly excited by this tremendous discovery. And never, too, had her natural strength of mind been so abruptly called upon to put forth all its powers; never was the readiness of self-possession so completely needed. Nor was she at fault in these respects. She became herself all in a moment; but it was with a terrible effort that cost agonies in making it, and the coolness she assumed was unnatural to a degree.

"It is indeed wonderful, my dear Doctor Ferney," she observed. "Your success in the art of preserving these objects is beyond all parallel. Truly, you must have discovered the Egyptian secret; the lost key has been found by you. But, ah," she suddenly exclaimed, as a clock in the museum struck eleven — a circumstance of which she was only too glad to avail herself as an excuse for immediate departure, — "is it possible that I have been here two long hours? And now it is so late. The time has slipped away — how fast, how fast. My dear Doctor Ferney, I must say farewell at once."

"And may I hope," inquired the physician, "that on some future occasion you will favour me with your presence in my humble abode? But no, not for the world unless perfectly agreeable to yourself — "

"Yes, doctor, I will assuredly visit you again. Meanwhile you will recollect the promise you have made me?"

"It were impossible to forget anything in connection with you, and equally impossible not to keep any pledge you have required."

Lady Saxondale was now escorted by Doctor Ferney out of the museum, and she appeared to breathe more freely when the door of that hideous place had closed behind her. Carefully covering her countenance with her veil again, she descended the stairs, preceded by the physician, who carried the light, and in the hall she bade him farewell. For a

moment he felt the pressure of her hand as it held his own, and when she had departed, and the street door was shut again, and the doctor was left to the solitude of his own thoughts, that pressure of the hand seemed to linger — it was still felt — and the music of the voice still sounded in his ears.

Strange was the love which this man felt for that woman, whose real name he knew not and of whose station in life he was equally ignorant. But this love of his — was it an infatuation? No, it was rather a deep and holy devotion which his heart offered up eternally at the shrine of love. How strange, then, is the influence of love, but in how many varied ways does it manifest its power! Even the strong mind of that man — a man given up to philosophic study and scientific research — yielded to its influence. Its etherealizing spirit commingled with the tide of his erudition, it interwove itself amidst the tissues of his learning, and ampler and ampler though the stores of knowledge grew in that man's soul, there was yet no infringement upon the space forming the tabernacle which enshrined his love.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE LISTENERS

On the following day, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, William Deveril knocked at the front door of Saxondale House.

"Is her ladyship at home?" he inquired of the hall porter; and while his face was very pale and even careworn, there was nevertheless a certain decisiveness in his looks and accents which indicated a firm and settled purpose.

"Her ladyship is at home, sir," was the porter's reply, given coldly though not insolently, "but I am sorry to say I have orders not to admit you."

"Under most circumstances such an intimation," replied Deveril, "would be respected by any one of good manners and breeding, but there are also circumstances which justify an individual in demanding an audience and insisting upon his demand being complied with. Such are the circumstances in which I am placed."

"I am afraid I cannot help you, sir," said the hall porter, standing at the door in such a way as to be ready to bar Deveril's entrance, should he make the attempt.

"Do not pay me such an ill compliment," he observed, in a gentle though manly tone of rebuke, "as to suppose that I shall endeavour to force my way into the house. I am incapable of such conduct. But what I desire is, that you send up a message to Lady Saxondale to the effect that I demand an interview, not as a favour, but as a right."

"I will certainly send up a message," said the hall porter, and no longer thinking it necessary to keep the doorway guarded, he turned around and directed a footman to report to her ladyship what Mr. Deveril had said.

In a few minutes the footman, who, different from the

hall porter, was an insolent, self-sufficient, conceited puppy of a fellow, came rushing down the stairs; and shouting out, "Her ladyship says you are to be off," banged the door violently in Deveril's face.

Now, it happened that Juliana Farefield was in the dining-room opening from the hall at the time this scene took place, and as the door was only ajar she overheard everything that passed. As the reader is aware, she was previously incredulous relative to her mother's tale, and the step which Deveril had thus taken fully confirmed this incredulity on her part. The calm, decisive manner in which Deveril had spoken appeared to be stamped with a consciousness of his own innocence and of the foul wrong which he had reecived, and as Juliana was very far from wanting in shrewdness and good sense, the young gentleman's conduct could not fail to make a strong impression on her mind. Thinking that he would either return, or else take some other step in order to procure an explanation at Lady Saxondale's hands, and being curious to watch the result, Juliana determined to be on the lookout for the remainder of the afternoon. Being presently joined by her sister, she communicated to her what had happened, and Constance, who likewise possessed a large share of curiosity, now became equally anxious to see how the affair would progress.

An hour after Deveril's rude dismissal from the house, a very loud knock and a very imperious ring were given at the front door, and the moment the hall porter opened it, a short, stout gentleman, well but quaintly dressed, marched without ceremony into the hall. Having thus gained a footing inside the fortress, he seemed to consider it as good as taken, for he said, in a tone of authority, to the impudent puppy of a footman who at once accosted him, "Show me up-stairs to her ladyship."

This mode of address, coupled with the gentleman's air of confidence, at once produced the desired effect, for he gave no card, and walked in with so little ceremony, it was natural to suppose that he knew perfectly well what he was doing and was certain of being well received. The footman accordingly conducted him up the spacious staircase, and on reaching the landing, he said, in the usual manner, "What name, sir, shall I announce?"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," was the reply.

"Mr. Gunthorpe!" vociferated the footman, as he threw open the door leading into the drawing-room where Lady Saxondale was seated.

Here we must interrupt the narrative for a moment to state that Juliana and Constance, being on the watch in the dining-room, had witnessed the arrival of the stout gentleman, had heard the imperious manner in which he addressed the footman, and had peeped forth to survey him with more attention than they had been enabled to bestow at the glimpse they caught of him from the window when ascending the front door-step.

"I do declare," whispered Juliana, "that he exactly answers the description given of that Mr. Gunthorpe whom Edmund described to us so ludicrously. The same scratch-wig, the same overhanging chin, the same curious fashioned garments."

"Yes, but what can he want with mamma?" asked Constance.

"Let us see," responded Juliana. "I have a presentiment that his visit is in some way or another connected with Mr. Deveril."

The two young ladies quitted the dining-room, ascended the staircase, and stealing into an apartment adjoining that where Mr. Gunthorpe had just been introduced to Lady Saxondale's presence, they placed themselves at the door of communication between the two rooms. The door was shut, but it was easy to overhear in one apartment what was taking place in the other, and so the two Misses Farefield were enabled to gratify their curiosity to the utmost extent.

Let us now look on the other side of the door at which Juliana and Constance are listening.

Lady Saxondale, on hearing the name of Mr. Gunthorpe announced, recognized it at once as that of an individual whom she had overheard her son Edmund hold up to ridicule one day when he was in a lively and bantering mood; and certainly the appearance of this gentleman was sufficient to confirm in her ladyship's mind whatsoever amount of ludicrous impression her son's discourse concerning him had previously made. Not for an instant did it strike Lady Saxondale that he came about William Deveril's business, and feeling offended at the unceremonious way in which

he had caused himself to be announced, she received him with the most freezing coldness. Mr. Gunthorpe was, however, the last person on the face of the earth to be discomfited by such a reception, and coolly taking a seat, though altogether unasked, he observed, "I dare say your ladyship is much surprised at this visit on the part of one who has obtained no formal introduction."

"I presume, sir," returned Lady Saxondale, with an ice-like dignity, "that, having some trifling knowledge of my son, you have called to see him. But he is not at home at the present time."

"I beg your ladyship to understand," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "that I should not take so unwarrantable a liberty as to presume upon my slight, very slight acquaintance with Lord Saxondale so far as to intrude myself upon the privacy of his mother. But my object is to have some serious conversation with your ladyship on behalf of a young gentleman in whom I am somewhat interested, — I mean Mr. Deveril."

So unexpectedly was this announcement made, and therefore so totally unprepared was Lady Saxondale to preserve her presence of mind when that name appeared to be thrown at her like an accusation, that she gave a sudden start and looked confused. But the loss of fortitude could only be momentary with a woman of her strong mind; and therefore immediately recovering herself, she said, coldly and distantly as before, "Out of respect for your years, sir, I will listen to what you may have to say, but I cannot promise you to pardon the young man on whose behalf you are come."

"Pardon, my lady!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, with some little show of indignation. "It is not pardon that he seeks, it is justice. Pardon is to be sought by those who injure, not by those who are injured."

"The only interpretation I can put upon your words, sir," rejoined Lady Saxondale, with a voice and look of consummate assurance, "is to suppose that Mr. Deveril has given you some false version of his conduct toward me."

"Or of your ladyship's conduct toward him? But no," exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, "he is incapable of speaking falsely."

"And I, sir," cried Lady Saxondale, her cheeks suffusing with a crimson glow and her eyes flashing fire, "do you dare insinuate that I am capable of speaking falsely?"

"Madam," returned Mr. Gunthorpe, "it is always an unpleasant business to have to make accusations at all, but the task becomes doubly disagreeable when the accuser is one of the stronger sex and the accused is one of the weaker. Such is the present case."

"Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lady Saxondale, rising from her seat upon the sofa, "this interview cannot proceed further."

"Madam," answered the old gentleman, "I am not a man to be diverted from my course by any overbearing conduct. I am not one of those who are dazzled by the false lustre of patrician rank. I know very well that meteors blaze at a distance, but when they fall down upon the earth they prove to be merely vile stones. So it is with the false gods and goddesses of the British aristocracy, and therefore I neither worship such idols nor can be intimidated by them."

"Mr. Gunthorpe, if you have come hither on purpose to insult me," said Lady Saxondale, resuming her seat upon the sofa, "I must submit, for it would grieve me much to be compelled to order my lackeys to eject a gentleman of your respectable appearance and advanced years."

"I am confident that you do not even entertain the thought of such a thing, Lady Saxondale, as daring to bid a lackey lay a hand upon me," and as Mr. Gunthorpe thus spoke, he looked her ladyship firmly and resolutely in the face, till, conscience-stricken, her own gaze cowered beneath his own. "Now, will you permit me without interruption to tell you a little anecdote, the object and purpose of which I will explain to you at the end? It is this: A lady of proud title, a widow, who has always borne in the presence of the world an untainted reputation, falls in love with a young man, much her inferior in what society has chosen to denominate rank. She is too much a slave to the artificialities and fictions of this same society to think of marrying the young man, but she has so little regard for decency, virtue, and real prudence as to offer to become this young man's mistress. Yes, this she did in language glowing and warm; and she appeared to think that she had only to make the proposition in order to have it at once accepted. But this

lady has grown-up daughters, to whom the best and brightest example should be afforded, and yet, in her foolish infatuation, and blinded by her passion, she offers to become the paramour of this young man whose personal beauty has aroused her desires. He rejects the proposal in terms of forbearing gentleness, but with loathing and abhorrence in his heart. Commiserating this lady who has so far forgotten herself in her unfortunate passion, he is even generous enough to promise the concealment of her folly, — or shall I say her wickedness? But she menaces him with a terrible vengeance. He leaves her with sorrow in his heart that so much depravity can exist, masked by a beauty of the grandest and most lofty character; and he hopes that her repentance may enable him to throw the veil of secrecy over what has occurred. But conceive what his feelings must be when he discovers that this lady, too faithful to her threatened plan of vengeance, deliberately and purposely calls upon her acquaintances and friends in order to propagate a tale entirely to the prejudice of this young man."

Mr. Gunthorpe ceased speaking, but continued to look very hard at Lady Saxondale, from whose countenance, indeed, he had not once removed his eyes during the whole time he was delivering that lengthy address. He saw that, notwithstanding her natural strength of mind and her proud assurance, she winced at his words, writhed under his narrative as he developed it, experienced an increasing confusion, and showed conscious guilt in every lineament of her countenance.

"Mr. Gunthorpe," she said, with a desperate effort to resume her self-possession, "it would be worse than childish for me to affect ignorance of the allusions you have been making. But, sir," — and she felt her fortitude revive as she went on speaking, — "if you dare attribute such conduct to me, if you dare put such a version upon whatsoever passed between Mr. Deveril and myself, I must denounce you as a calumniator and must order you from my presence."

"Be it as you will, madam," said the old gentleman, rising from his seat and taking up his broad-brimmed hat from the chair on which he had deposited it in companionship with his gold-headed cane. "But perhaps you are not aware of the course which it will be necessary to take under existing circumstances. Lady Saxondale, I am a rich man,

and for no purpose would I sooner dispense a portion of my wealth than to procure justice for this Mr. William Deveril whom you have so cruelly and wantonly injured. Doubtless you thought, Lady Saxondale, that with your high position, your proud name, your lofty station, and, if need were, even with your gold, you might crush at your will that young man. But it shall not be so. He is not without friends; at all events, he has one in me. And I now warn your ladyship that the tribunals shall be appealed to, an action for defamation of character shall be commenced against you — "

" Enough, sir, enough! I have already heard far too much," cried Lady Saxondale, starting up from her seat, for she saw that there was now no alternative but to meet the affair with a brazen effrontery, to take a bold and desperate stand, and to bid defiance to all menaces and to all hostile proceedings.

" One word more, madam," said Mr. Gunthorpe, whose manner seemed to be invested with an authoritativeness irresistibly powerful, and which, despite the resolve to which she had just come, exercised its influence over Lady Saxondale. " You possess two daughters, two grown-up daughters, young women indeed, of a marriageable age, and for whom you are doubtless anxious to seek befitting alliances. Consider, madam, the demoralizing example which your conduct is but too well calculated to set them. Think you that if you push the present deplorable incident to the utmost extreme nothing will transpire detrimental to yourself? Yes, believe me, all the world will put faith in William Deveril's story in preference to your own; and if the verdict of a jury should stamp you as a calumniatrix, it will by the same decision proclaim you to be nothing more than a demirep. Then, madam, what will become of your daughters? Will their mother's evil reputation accelerate their chances of forming suitable and proper matrimonial connections? And your son, too, over whom, as I understand, your authority even at present is by no means well established, will he regard the exposure of your gross passion for Deveril and your licentious overtures as a reason why he should become more obedient? Think of all this, Lady Saxondale, ere you precipitate matters to an irrevocable extreme. At present you may privately repair the injury done to Deveril in those quarters where you have privately inflicted it.

I know that it will be gall and wormwood for you to be compelled to recant your allegations, confess that they were calumnies, and give some explanation for your sudden hostility toward him, but ten thousand times worse will it be if in a court of justice all the details of the case are brought to light. Now, madam, for the last time, what is your decision? "

"I have nothing more to say, sir," responded Lady Saxondale, desperately clinging to the resolve she had already formed, and to meet all consequences with a brazen effrontery. "If I have listened to you so long, it is, I repeat, out of respect for your age."

"No, Lady Saxondale," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, showing by his look that he could read to the depths of her heart as plainly as the eye can penetrate through a crystal streamlet to its pebbly bottom, "you have been influenced by no such generous motive. It is fear, Lady Saxondale, fear that has made you listen to me to the end, — yes, fear, I repeat, despite the powerful efforts which you have exerted and are still exerting to conquer the sentiment. But I will intrude no longer."

At this moment the door opened from the landing, and Lord Saxondale entered the room. He was lounging in with that fashionable affectation of languor and lassitude which seemed as if anything like an exertion were too much for his aristocratic constitution on a sultry day in the middle of summer, when catching sight of Mr. Gunthorpe, he instantly burst into an ironical laugh, exclaiming, in his cracked voice, "Ah! my worthy friend of the Bell and Crown, what on earth has brought you from the vulgar regions of the City? You must feel terribly out of place in our fashionable atmosphere."

Nothing could equal the look of mingled scorn and contempt which Mr. Gunthorpe bent upon Edmund Saxondale as the latter delivered himself of those flippant impertinences. The old gentleman was at that instant neither comical nor common-looking; there was something exceedingly noble and dignified in his appearance, as if he felt, in the depths of his own heart, that instead of standing before a superior it was he himself who was gazing down from a higher pedestal than the conceited young coxcomb could ever dream of occupying, no matter what advantages he might possess

in respect to birth, rank, riches, and honours. Lady Saxondale herself, who possessed the nicest appreciation of everything that savoured of real dignity, was astonished at the superior look which Mr. Gunthorpe wore at that instant, and even Edmund was overawed by the old gentleman's appearance. His mind was not so completely perverted but he felt he deserved the overwhelming rebuke conveyed in Mr. Gunthorpe's indignant glances, and the rebuke, too, was more cutting and more searching a thousand times when thus conveyed than if it had been given in words. But still Edmund was not at all the young man to submit with a good grace to the castigation, and, promptly recovering his habitual impertinence and self-sufficiency, he gave another affected laugh, exclaiming, "Well done, old fellow! You look just as you did that day when you blew up the cabman in Jermyn Street. You remember what I mean?"

"Madam," said Mr. Gunthorpe, turning his eyes toward Lady Saxondale and bending a significant look upon her, "I really pity you in the possession of such a son as this."

"You insolent old scoundrel!" ejaculated Edmund, becoming all in a moment livid with rage; and clenching his fist, he was about to rush toward the old gentleman, when the latter held up his gold-headed cane with a resoluteness that made the coward youth fall back.

"If you were to dare lay a finger on me, my lord," said Mr. Gunthorpe, calmly, "I would inflict that chastisement which you so richly deserve."

Thus speaking, he walked forth from the apartment, while Lady Saxondale pulled the bell violently. A couple of footmen instantaneously rushed to the room, and Lady Saxondale exclaimed, "Let that person be at once shown out of the house, and never admitted again."

"Yes, and let him be kicked out!" screamed forth the infuriate Edmund, as he rushed out upon the landing, and looking over the staircase gave this vent to his impotent rage against Mr. Gunthorpe.

But the old gentleman descended the stairs as coolly and imperturbably as if he were merely retiring after having paid an ordinary visit of courtesy, while the ferule of his cane tapped upon every one of the marble steps as he continued his way.

"What did that old fool want here?" demanded Lord

Saxondale as he sped back into the drawing-room, now intent upon venting his ill-humour upon his mother by seeking a quarrel with her.

"Rather let me ask," returned her ladyship, who was in precisely a similar mood toward her son, "how you dare insult a visitor whom you find with me, and thus lead to a scene which is calculated to scandalize the entire household?"

"I insult him, indeed!" ejaculated Edmund, now flinging himself lazily upon the sofa, as if exhausted by the effort of even putting himself into a rage. "Why, I think you took it up pretty warmly, too, by ringing the bell in that frantic manner and giving such orders to the servants. But I say, mother, what is this story that I hear running like wildfire all over London? Young William Deveril has been making love to you? Now you see what it is to have anything to do with such low fellows as these. I always disliked him, and was a deuced great mind to kick him out of the house."

But Lady Saxondale only threw a glance of sovereign contempt, upon her son, as if she knew him to be a coward in his heart, notwithstanding the ridiculous boast he had just made; and feeling the necessity of seeking the retirement of her own chamber in order to compose her agitated feelings and ponder well upon the particulars of her interview with Mr. Gunthorpe, she quitted the room.

Meanwhile Juliana and Constance had in the adjoining apartment overheard everything which had taken place. From the very first Juliana had never believed her mother's story respecting Deveril, and the result of Mr. Gunthorpe's visit was to confirm her opinion of its complete and utter falsity. To the same conclusion was Constance necessitated to arrive, though more slowly, with far less readiness to discredit her mother, and with feelings of regret to which Juliana was an entire stranger. Well indeed had Mr. Gunthorpe expatiated on the demoralizing effect of such an example set by a mother to her daughters, yet little did he think that the influence of this example was already felt, little did he imagine that even as he spoke his prophetic hands were receiving their fulfilment. And what was the picture presented to the contemplation of these young ladies? That their mother, having cast her affections upon an object

whom the conventionalisms of society did not permit her to marry, even if he himself were inclined to espouse her, had offered to take him as a paramour, to throw herself into his arms as his mistress! For that Mr. Gunthorpe had only too faithfully recited what had really passed between their mother and Deveril, Juliana and Constance felt assured; and now, therefore, they had been brought to regard their own parent as a mere demirep in heart, wearing virtue as a mask, and concealing a real depravity beneath that exterior of severe hauteur and imposing dignity.

Whatsoever was impassioned in the temperaments of Juliana and Constance was now rendered all the more glowing, especially in the case of the former, whose hot blood literally boiled in her veins. All the latent heat of her imagination was in a moment fanned into a blaze, a veil appeared to have fallen from her eyes, and she rushed to the conclusion that no women were really virtuous, but that all would seek the opportunity of gratifying their passions, trusting to conceal their frailty and their guilt beneath the mask of hypocrisy. Even the comparatively pure mind of Constance caught the poisonous infection arising from the same source, and in the space of a brief half-hour those two sisters had become years older in the depravities of the imagination.

Oh, wretched, wretched Lady Saxondale, if you could only have known how much of the evil seed which is naturally implanted in frail human nature had been all on a sudden made to shoot forth and germinate with fearful rapidity, even almost to the bearing of its kindred fruits, in the bosoms of your daughters, you would have shrunk appalled from the startling fact that it was your doing. For, oh, the Medusa-head of a mother's bad example will paralyze and turn to rigid stone all the lively virtues and healthy qualities of her children. Woe unto thee, Lady Saxondale!

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE MIRROR

About two hours later in the day, Juliana Farefield, dressed for dinner in a costume that set off her finely developed charms to the utmost advantage, was half-reclining upon a sofa in one of the drawing-rooms, and whiling away the time with a volume of the last new novel. Little however of its contents did the lady's memory retain, for though she was reading of love there, she was thinking of love at the same time apart from the topic of the book. Her ideas seemed to flow in two distinct channels, — one following the course of the glowing descriptions of love as dressed up by the novelist, the other pursuing the raptures and blandishments of love as she herself felt and understood them.

There was a heightened colour upon her cheeks, a dewy moisture upon her rich red lips, a melting languor in her fine dark eyes, — a langour the sensuousness of which was deepened by the half-closing of the lids, as if those eyes, faithfully reflecting the condition of the mind, were weighed down by the delicious thoughts that rested on her soul within. For the soul itself feels a kind of pleasurable oppressiveness and the weight of a softly sensuous languor when the imagination gives way to the rapt dreamings of love, even as the bee, which sips sweets from every flower, is oppressed by the burden of the delicious food wherewith it is laden, or as the breezes of an Oriental clime become heavy with the rich perfumes and odours which they have accumulated while they wandered kissingly over the brightest and fairest flowers of the earth.

Juliana was alone at the time in that room. Constance was in her own chamber, penning a response to a billet which she had received from the Marquis de Villebelle, through the

agency of the faithful Mary Anne. Lady Saxondale was likewise in her own room, pondering upon her unpleasant interview with Mr. Gunthorpe, and revolving a thousand wild and desperate plans in her mind for the purpose of arresting the hostile proceedings menaced by that gentleman on the part of William Deveril. As for Lord Saxondale, after having returned home for an hour or two just to see if there were any letters for him, he had gone back to the villa in the Seven Sisters Road, laden with new presents and a fresh supply of costly gifts for the designing and fascinating Emily Archer.

Juliana therefore was alone in the drawing-room between five and six o'clock on that day of which we are writing, and what with the inspirations of the novel she was reading, the glowing character of her own thoughts, and the influence of those revelations which had come to her ears in respect to her mother, it was no wonder if she should at length fall into the following train of reflections:

"Assuredly I should become the laughing-stock of the whole world," she said to herself, as she laid aside her book, "if I were to run away with Frank Paton and marry him. Yes, for no matter what the secret of his birth may really be, he is but a page after all; and if I wait till that mystery is cleared up with the hope that he may eventually prove to be the son of distinguished persons, I may wait long enough. Besides, how is it possible to wait? I feel that this passion is devouring me — Those, by the bye, are the very words which I have just now read in the novel. How truly some authors do depict our feelings. It was all very well for me to declare to Constance yesterday that I gloried in this love of mine, and that I should feel proud in becoming the wife of Francis Paton. Yes, but then I did not choose to acknowledge even to myself that there was any shame attached to this love, — any reason to blush for it. It was an attempt to blazen forth something that nevertheless sat upon the heart like a remorse. Wherefore should I not imitate my mother's example? She would not marry William Deveril, but she — "

And then Juliana, not yet thoroughly depraved, checked the thought to which she was almost unconsciously giving expression in her musings, and, returning to her book, she endeavoured to evade at least that portion of the ideas which

had stolen upon her. But it was in vain; the idea was there, the seed had dropped upon a soil by no means unprepared to receive it, and although it might be covered up for a moment, it was nevertheless certain to take root, indeed all the more certain on that very account.

Presently the door opened, and Lady Saxondale entered the apartment. Juliana just lifted her eyes above her book to see who it was, and then went on reading without saying a word. In the same manner her ladyship glanced toward the sofa to see who was half-reclining there, and likewise without speaking a word, she turned to the farther extremity of the spacious room. There was a mutual feeling of embarrassment and mistrust on the part of the mother and the elder daughter. Lady Saxondale knew that her tale concerning Deveril had not been believed by Juliana, and her guilty conscience therefore made her think that the real truth of the transaction was suspected, for she was very far from entertaining an idea how completely it was known. On the other hand, Juliana, being as yet young in the ways of duplicity and deceit, was always fearful lest her mother's eagle glance should detect her passion for the page; and now that somewhat unholy thoughts had risen in the young lady's mind, her conscience suggested still more troubling fears than before. Thus was it that mistrust and suspicion subsisted between the patrician lady and her daughter.

Lady Saxondale retired, we said, to the farther extremity of the apartment, and seating herself on a sofa, fell into a profound reverie. By a certain arrangement of drapery in the room, that sofa where Lady Saxondale had seated herself was concealed from the view of Juliana, and for the same reason the latter, at the place where she lay half-reclined, was hidden from the eyes of her mother.

The young lady went on reading her book, ten minutes or a quarter of an hour elapsed, and as the love-passages of the tale grew more interesting, her attention became all the more completely absorbed in the perusal. The consequence was she altogether forgot the presence of her mother in the room, forgot it indeed as completely as if her ladyship were not there at all.

Presently the door opened again, and this time it was Frank Paton who entered. The beautiful youth appeared more beautiful than ever to the eyes of Juliana, inflamed

as her imagination was at the moment, and thus keenly prone to enhance every detail of attraction and lineament of beauty. An electric thrill shot quiveringly through her, the colour heightened upon her cheeks, and fixing upon him as he approached a look brimful of passion, she half-murmured, "Adorable boy, how I love you — Oh, how I love you."

He advanced close up to her, handing her a letter which had just arrived.

"Frank, dear Frank," she said, in a low soft voice, as his eyes looked tenderly down into hers, and she patted his face with her hand.

He bent down toward her, invited by her gaze and her caresses to do so, and then their lips met in a long delicious kiss. At that instant the recollection flashed to Juliana's mind that Lady Saxondale was in the room, and full of affright was the glance which she threw toward the farther extremity. But the drapery hid her mother from her sight, and she experienced a feeling of indescribable relief at the reflection that she must in the same manner be concealed from her parent's view. Frank had noticed that sudden start, that quick glance of uneasiness, and the sudden disappearance of the carnation hue from her cheeks of delicately tinted bistre, and instantaneously comprehending what all this meant, he likewise grew pale with affright. But Juliana gave him a reassuring tap on the cheek with her hand, so that the young page glided from the room more than ever in love if possible with the handsome Juliana.

This young lady then resumed her book, but instead of reading it, gave way to all the rapturous thoughts which the little scene just described had conjured up in her mind.

But every detail of that scene had been witnessed by Lady Saxondale, and in a very simple manner too: namely, the reflecting of the mirrors which embellished the walls of the apartment, and some of which, between the windows, descended to the floor. Yes, every detail of that scene had been witnessed by Juliana's mother. Not that she was watching her daughter at the time through the medium of the telltale mirrors. She was not even thinking of her; but it was in a mood of the most perfect abstraction that the eyes of Lady Saxondale were fixed upon the looking-glass opposite to her. Conceive her astonishment when she beheld the page bending over Juliana, the latter caressing his cheek with her hand,

— yes, even to the looks of passion which her daughter riveted on the handsome youth, did Lady Saxondale behold. But if there were any doubt in her mind, — if for a moment she fancied there could be any mistake upon the subject, — all uncertainty was cleared up by that long kiss of deliciousness and fervour in which the lips of Juliana and Francis were joined. Lady Saxondale sat perfectly aghast. It was impossible to disbelieve her eyes, and yet she still disbelieved the interpretation which she put upon what she saw. She believed and she disbelieved; all uncertainty was cleared up, and yet she dared not settle her mind upon the conviction thus established. But when the page had retired, when Juliana had resumed her book, when Lady Saxondale was compelled to admit to herself that what she had seen was true, and what had taken place was unmistakable, she felt such an awful feeling come over her that she sat like one petrified, turned into stone, with all the marble's terrible chill at her heart.

Good heavens! what a blow for the pride of the haughty Lady Saxondale. She who plumed herself so highly upon having prolonged the race into which she had married, — the time-honoured race of Saxondale; she who regarded that name as one of the proudest chronicled in the pages of British history; she who had hoped that ere long some excellent match must present itself for her eldest daughter; she it was who now became compelled to admit to herself that this daughter had descended to amorous dalliance with a page. And in such a case it was no wonder if her ladyship abandoned herself to a belief in the worst: namely, that Juliana had been more culpable than she really was. At this thought the sense of petrifaction passed quickly away, and was instantaneously succeeded by a feeling as if molten lead had suddenly taken the place of blood in her veins, or as if that blood, which a moment before seemed stagnant, had all in an instant been made to boil by the presence of some subtle but all-potent Promethean fire. There was a tingling sensation all over her, and her first impulse was to spring from her seat, rush forward, and tax Juliana with her supposed frailty and shame. But a second thought held her back. She remembered the increasing rebelliousness of her elder daughter's spirit, and she apprehended a scene which might lead to exposure before the household. Besides, if

the evil were done it could not be repaired, and all the angry words in the world would not restore a lost virtue. Lady Saxondale therefore curbed her rage, bridled her indignation, and resolved to take no rash nor inconsiderate step. She must separate her daughter from the page, but even this she felt that it were impolitic to do all in a moment, lest Juliana in her wilfulness should leave the house with him, thus abandoning herself altogether to this passion of hers.

Terrible was the state of mind into which the unhappy woman was plunged. Calamities and cares of all kinds seemed gathering around her, and she appeared involved in the tangled web of a destiny that must terminate in ruin. But not long did her ladyship give way to these gloomy reflections. She was too strong-minded to become despondent or despairing on a sudden. She felt that she had need of all her energies in the various matters engaging her attention, and she said to herself, " It is absolutely necessary that I should be equal to the task of meeting all difficulties and accomplishing all ends."

Lady Saxondale's musings were suddenly interrupted by the bursting open of the door nearest to where she sat, — for there were two doors to that spacious apartment, — and the housekeeper Mabel bounced into the room. By the agility of her movements she certainly appeared to have got well rid of her rheumatism, and if she had been eating the most peppery viands for dinner she could not possibly have been fired up with a greater degree of irritability than she displayed at present. We may even go so far as to state that she was in a boiling rage, and her red face, inflamed as it was with passion, looked like a perfect conflagration in contrast with the white cap with large frills that bordered this rubicund physiognomy.

" Mabel," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, starting from her seat in anticipation of a scene with her irate housekeeper, " what is the meaning of this abrupt intrusion? "

" Intrusion indeed," screamed forth the woman whom this unfortunate word now appeared to excite almost to a positive frenzy, " everybody is bent on insulting me! But I will put up with it no longer. There is that jackanapes of a fellow who calls himself — "

" Mabel," cried her ladyship, " take care what you say,"

and it was a strange look that she threw upon her housekeeper. " Tell me, what has my son been doing? "

" Doing? he is always doing something to vex and annoy me," was the response. " I never saw such a sneaking, cowardly fellow in all my life. He has been and told his valet that he will have me bundled out neck-and-crop just because I didn't stand aside and curtsy to him as he came down-stairs this afternoon. But you know very well that he can't put his threat into execution, don't you, Lady Saxondale? "

" Mother," said Juliana, now rising from the sofa and advancing toward that part of the room where this scene was taking place, " I hope you will not believe everything that Mabel says against Edmund, for I must declare that a more insolent woman than this never had existence. She is constantly showing her airs to me and Constance, and all the servants of the household hate her."

" Oh, they do, do they? " shrieked forth Mabel, the sharp tones of her querulous voice ringing through the room. " Then I will make them have something more to hate me for, and as for you, miss, I snap my fingers at you."

" Mabel, Mabel," cried Lady Saxondale, who appeared cruelly tortured by this scene, " I must insist — "

" Mother," interposed Juliana, " things have come to this pass in respect to Mabel that either you or she must show who is mistress here. For my part, I am resolved not to put up with her insolence any longer," and with these words Juliana walked out of the room, closing the door somewhat violently behind her.

" There, you see how I am treated," cried the woman the instant she was alone with Lady Saxondale. " Everybody in the house thinks they have a right to insult me."

" Compose yourself, Mabel," said Lady Saxondale, with a look and accents of earnest entreaty. " It is useless for you to give way to these fits of rage — "

" Rage indeed," she echoed. " Then why do they insult me, eh? Answer me that — answer me that! "

" I must say that you either imagine insults where none are intended, or else draw them down upon your own head. No one, Mabel, would travel out of their way to put a wanton and unmerited insult upon you."

" Ah! I suppose you are going to turn around upon me

now. But you sha'n't, though," cried Mabel, with threatening looks and gestures. " Recollect, Lady Saxondale, that with a single breath I could blow to the winds all this fabric of — "

" Hush, Mabel, hush, for God's sake! Talk not so wildly, so rashly," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, as she flung a quick glance of apprehension around. " The very walls may have ears — But stay, let us come to some understanding. You are not happy beneath this roof, and over and over again I have offered to provide for you elsewhere. Why will you not retire to some comfortable little retreat, where, with a handsome allowance, you can be your own mistress and do exactly what you like? "

" Why don't I? " ejaculated Mabel; " for many reasons. In the first place, because I don't choose to be kicked off like an old shoe; in the second place, because I am fond of authority, and therefore mean to keep my post of housekeeper here; and in the third place, because I hate certain persons beneath this roof, and therefore enjoy the opportunity of showing my dislike."

These last words the woman spoke with a fiendish malignity which testified to the abhorrent nature of her disposition, and Lady Saxondale became deadly pale and trembled in every chord and fibre of her whole being as she listened.

" But, Mabel," she said, subduing her emotions as well as she could, " this is most unreasonable on your part. Do, for Heaven's sake, have some consideration for me! What have I ever done to offend you? Have I not treated you with confidence, — done all I could to make you happy — "

" Come, none of this stuff and nonsense, Lady Saxondale," interrupted Mabel, who looked as if she were determined not to be appeased in any way. " I just tell you once for all that I mean my authority in this house to be second only to yours, that I will have that jackanapes of a fellow and that minx Juliana treat me with becoming respect. So you had better tell them to do so, or else I will have my revenge, no matter what are the consequences."

The woman had grasped the handle of the door as she thus spoke, and was about to fling out of the room, when Lady Saxondale made a motion for her to remain.

" Well, what is it? " demanded Mabel, insolently.

" You must not, you really must not give away to these humours — "

" Humours indeed," and Mabel burst forth into another tirade, pretty well in the same strain as before.

While she was thus giving voluble vent to her perverse and malignant feelings, Lady Saxondale gradually grew grave and thoughtful. Some idea seemed to be expanding in her mind, and it was evident this new thought was tending toward a desperate resolve. Mabel was still too much a prey to her irritated feelings to notice the ominous expression which Lady Saxondale's countenance had gradually assumed, and after giving vent to some more of her ill-humour, she abruptly withdrew.

" This matter is also coming to a crisis," muttered Lady Saxondale to herself, as the door closed behind the housekeeper. " Mabel is now the most dangerous of all those with whom I have to contend. But — "

And she stopped suddenly short, while the sinister lowering of her brows, the firm compression of her lips, and the decided air with which she turned toward the window sufficiently indicated the adoption of some energetic resolve.

Soon afterward a footman entered to announce that dinner was served up. Lady Saxondale accordingly descended to the dining-room, where Juliana and Constance had already met. The three ladies dined alone together that day. There was no company invited, and such a dinner was always held as the dullest thing in the world amongst people in high life. For the families of the aristocracy have seldom any resources of their own, while the frivolities and platitudes of fashionable life become wearisome to a degree, stale and flat beyond measure, when practised amongst themselves. Thus it is that they seldom dine without guests at their table. On the present occasion, therefore, the dinner scene was tedious and insipid to a degree; but little conversation passed, and that was of a languid description. Nevertheless Lady Saxondale was the whole time watching Juliana's countenance, without appearing to take any unusual notice of her. She looked, with the keen eye of a mother, to probe the young lady's secret to the very uttermost and ascertain if there were any indications to confirm her worst suspicion, but on this head she could gather nothing certain.

The cloth was removed and the dessert was upon the table, when Francis Paton entered the room, and, accosting Lady Saxondale, bent down and whispered something in a low voice. Her ladyship gave an involuntary start, and even turned pale for a moment, all of which was observed by Juliana, though she appeared to be deeply occupied at the moment in cutting off the rind from a slice of pineapple.

"Tell the person I will see her in a few minutes," said Lady Saxondale, aloud.

Francis Paton bowed and withdrew, and her ladyship, who evidently remained only for the sake of not appearing to be flurried by the announcement she had received, affected to talk a little more blithely than she had ere now done. But in a few minutes she rose and quitted the room, intimating that she should return almost directly.

"I am convinced," said Juliana to Constance the moment the door closed behind their mother, "that the message she received was from the same old woman who called the night of the great dinner-party. I am certain it is. What would I give to discover her business! But I do not see how it is possible to go and listen at the parlour door."

"No, do not risk it, dear Juliana," urged Constance. "To tell you the truth, I almost wish we had not listened to-day when Mr. Gunthorpe called. It is so shocking a thing to have one's confidence shaken in one's own mother."

"Nonsense," ejaculated Juliana. "We are getting too old for such mawkish sentimentalism, and I for one mean in future to be my own mistress. But this woman — I must go and ascertain if it be she."

With these words Juliana tripped forth from the dining-room which opened into the hall. On the opposite side was the parlour into which persons calling on any private business were usually shown, and it was in that parlour the young lady knew her mother to be now closeted with the woman whose arrival had been announced by Francis. No one was in the hall at the moment, and Juliana, unable to resist the opportunity and the temptation, approached the parlour door. She heard a female voice speaking at the moment.

"But I insist upon it," said this voice, in a peremptory manner and with loud accents. "I insist upon it, I repeat."

"Hush! do not be so violent," immediately answered Lady Saxondale, in an imploring tone, which sounded

singular indeed when coming from her haughty lips. " How can I possibly do it? The police have got the matter in hand — "

" Yes, they have, and you have put them too much on the right scent," at once retorted the woman. " Chiffin — for that's the name of the principal one — is a man too useful to me at times to be parted with so easily — "

" But consider, my good woman," urged Lady Saxondale, " how extraordinary it will seem if I send for the officer who has this matter in hand, and tell him that I would rather put up with the loss of my property than have him proceed further in the matter. I cannot do it; it would compromise me seriously. Ask what you will for yourself, I will give you more money — "

" No, I am bent on this, and will have it done," rejoined the woman, in a still more peremptory tone than before. " Don't thwart me, Lady Saxondale, or else — "

At this moment Juliana's ear caught the sounds of footsteps ascending the stairs from the servants' offices below, and she was compelled to make a precipitate retreat into the dining-room. Terribly annoyed she was at being thus disturbed in the middle of listening to a discourse so fraught with a strange wild interest, and of which she had just caught a sufficiency of the topic to excite her liveliest curiosity. The little she had heard she at once repeated to her sister, and Constance was astonished at the circumstance of any one possessing the power to dictate in such a way to her mother. Indeed, both the sisters were well-nigh confounded at what had taken place. The object of the woman, even from the little which had been said, was apparent enough: namely, to compel Lady Saxondale to put a stop to the search which was being instituted by the police after the men who had broken into the house. Then this woman must be intimately connected with those men? She had indeed said so. Heavens! by what strange circumstance had such a woman acquired any power or influence over the haughty Lady Saxondale? Vain and bewildering conjectures.

" Constance," said Juliana, in a tone far more serious and grave than she was often wont to adopt, " I like this circumstance less than anything which has ever yet occurred. The revelations our ears received to-day through the medium of Mr. Dunthorpe are as nothing in comparison with what

we have learned this evening. That our mother may have conceived an affection for Mr. Deveril is nothing so very remarkable, for she is but a woman, after all, and indeed the circumstance becomes utterly insignificant when viewed in contrast with the incident of the last few minutes. It is clear that a woman who is the friend and companion of thieves (and judging from her language most likely a thief herself) can come to Saxondale House and dictate terms in the most peremptory manner to one of the proudest peeresses in the realm. There is something strange and unnatural in all this, and it must be a curious secret which has thus placed our mother in this woman's power."

" A secret, Juliana," returned Constance, with an involuntary shudder, " which it were well for you not to seek to penetrate. Oh, I wish to Heaven that you had taken my advice, and not stolen forth from the room ere now. I am sadly, sadly frightened — "

" Do not be so foolish, Constance," replied Juliana, somewhat sharply. " Whatever this secret may be, I am resolved to penetrate it. Who knows how serviceable the knowledge of it may prove to us? " she added, significantly.

" Good heavens! in what sense? " asked Constance, gazing upon her sister with unfeigned surprise.

" Do you not catch my meaning? Have we not secrets of our own? Well, then, the more we know of our mother's secrets the less can she blame us for whatever she might happen to find out in respect to ourselves."

Constance looked pained and vexed at this answer, and after a pause of nearly a minute, she said, in a low, hesitating voice, " I think, Juliana, that even in the last words you have spoken there is some hidden meaning which I did not exactly catch."

" My dear girl," replied the elder sister, " we are both in love, and we are both peculiarly situated. If you marry the Marquis of Villebelle, you will be no wife in reality, inasmuch as he has a wife already; and if I marry Francis Paton, I become the laughing-stock of all the world. Now, therefore, under such circumstances, it would be by far better for us not to marry at all — "

" What, and renounce our love? " ejaculated Constance. " Oh, if you are so fickle, Juliana, it is widely different with me."

"I am as far from holding the intention as you are of renouncing this passion of mine," responded Juliana. "I could not do it even if I wished; it is stronger than myself. But I again advise that we should not marry, and also that we keep our loves secret."

"And what do you mean, then?" asked Constance, with fluttering heart and changing colour, for she half-suspected the response she would receive.

"Has not our dear mother," returned Juliana, with a laugh of ironical archness, "set us the example how to act? and did not Mr. Gunthorpe predict that we should profit by it? Now, my dear Constance, I have very little doubt in my own mind that Mr. Gunthorpe's prophecy will somehow or another receive its fulfilment."

"Enough, Juliana, enough!" cried Constance, whose soul retained a sufficiency of its virgin purity to recoil from the suggestions which her elder sister had thus thrown out, and with the indelicacy of which she was truly and sincerely shocked. "Oh, my dear Juliana, I beseech, I implore you, not to allow these thoughts to gain upon you."

"Can you deny, Constance, that you yourself have been somewhat changed by all you overheard this morning from Mr. Gunthorpe's lips in respect to our mother?" asked Juliana.

"No, I could not deny it," replied Constance, murmuringly; and it was with an evident reluctance that she looked inward for a moment to find in the depths of her soul the answer which she thus gave to her sister's question.

"Let us say no more upon the subject now," observed Juliana. "I have no doubt that by this time to-morrow you will have made some progress in your ideas. It has been so with me. Two or three hours back, before dinner, I also repudiated the thought which stole upon me, and now I can look it face to face, deliberately and calmly."

Silence then ensued between the sisters, Constance falling into a deep and evidently painful reverie. In a few minutes Lady Saxondale returned to the room, and it was with no inconsiderable difficulty that her daughters could prevent themselves from regarding her with a fixedness and intensity of look that might have well excited her suspicion as to the eavesdropping which had been practised by the elder one. Her ladyship was certainly pale, and there was a subdued

trouble in her looks, a suppressed terror which could not altogether escape her daughters' notice. But they managed to preserve their countenances in such a way that Lady Saxondale entertained not the slightest suspicion that they had acquired any insight into the scene which had just taken place.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE SNARE

We must now return to Henrietta Leyden, whose mysterious disappearance had plunged her mother into such profound despair. The reader will remember that on the day when happiness seemed to have reentered the dwelling of those who had known so much misfortune, Henrietta went forth between three and four o'clock in the afternoon to pay a visit to the opera, her object being to leave a note expressive of gratitude for Angela Vivaldi, and also to explain to the ballet-master the circumstances under which she was enabled to retire from a position which had never been to her taste. It will also be recollected that Henrietta was enabled, in consequence of the benevolence of Mr. Gunthorpe, to make a considerable improvement in her toilet, and thus was it that in a plain but pretty dress, a simple but becoming bonnet, and a neat shawl, the young damsel tripped gaily along the streets, the lightness of her heart giving a kindred elasticity to her steps.

Sweetly pretty then appeared Henrietta Leyden. Joy was dancing in her mild blue eyes, and instead of a soft melancholy upon her countenance, her features beamed with a light even bordering upon radiance. Then, her figure was so admirably set off, in its slender but symmetrical proportions, by the neat and tasteful garb which she wore; and beneath the skirt of her dress glancingly peeped forth those exquisitely shaped feet and beautifully turned ankles which had so well fitted her for the ballet-dance. Yes, full of happiness was now the heart of the young maiden, and she had forgotten the unpleasant impression made upon her mind by her mother's suspicions when she had returned in the middle of the night with Angela Vivaldi's gold in

her hand. Still, notwithstanding the halo of happiness which surrounded her, Henrietta's demeanour retained that modest reserve and bashful timidity which belonged to the purity of her character; and though in her beauty there was attraction for the gaze of the libertine, yet in her manner there was no encouragement for his advances.

Henrietta reached the opera, and entered the building as usual by the stage door. To some official did she entrust her note for Signora Vivaldi, and she passed onward, through the labyrinthine corridors, to the stage, in order to speak to the ballet-master. Three or four male loungers were standing in the wings witnessing the evolutions of the half-dozen ballet-girls who were practising at the time upon the stage, but Henrietta threw not more than a passing glance upon those loungers, and hurrying timidly by, fearful of some familiarity or insult at their hands, entered on the back part of the stage.

In a few minutes the ballet-master observed the damsel, and beckoning her toward him, said, in a somewhat angry manner, "How is it, Miss Leyden, that you were not here at three o'clock, according to my directions? You know that you are yet very imperfect in the pirouette, and also — But I see," he suddenly interrupted himself, as he noticed the change in her apparel, "you are like the rest of them, I suppose, and have now got your head turned with fine garments."

"You wrong me, sir," replied Henrietta, the blood rushing to her cheeks. "I came to apologize for not being here at the hour named, and to explain that the same cause which prevented me from attending according to your directions will enable me, I hope, to leave the stage for ever."

"And that cause?" said the ballet-master, inquiringly, but neither superciliously nor insolently, for there was something in the young girl's manner, as well as a sincerity in her look and her accents, which made him hesitate ere he yielded to the belief that she had followed the usual course and accepted the overtures of some libertine lover.

"As I do not wish, sir," rejoined Henrietta, "to incur the evil suspicions of yourself, or any one acquainted with me here, I am glad that you question me thus. Heaven has sent a kind friend to the succour of my poor invalid mother, my little brother, and myself."

"But who is this friend?" asked the ballet-master, his curiosity being excited.

"Oh, such a benevolent, kind-hearted, but eccentric old gentleman," returned Henrietta. "I do not know his name, but he is coming at six o'clock to conduct us all away from our present wretched abode to a more comfortable lodging. He has taken compassion upon us, and has already given the most generous proofs of his friendship."

There was the unsophisticated communicativeness of true gratitude on the part of the young girl which allowed no scope for questioning her sincerity. She evidently experienced a pure and holy joy in thus dilating upon the bounties of which herself and those who were so dear to her had become the object. It would have been impossible for even the most suspicious individual, and one who put no confidence in the virtue of the female sex, to doubt the truth of Miss Leyden's artless narrative. The ballet-master, who certainly had little faith in the morals of opera-dancers generally, nevertheless believed every syllable which Henrietta spoke, and with a somewhat kinder tone than he had ever addressed her in before, he said, "I wish you well, and hope that everything will turn out for the best."

She thanked him for his good wishes, and having taken leave of him, stayed but a few minutes more to bid farewell to some of the ballet-dancers who accosted her, and who were curious to learn wherefore she was going to leave the opera. She gave the same explanation she had just given to the ballet-master, and then hastened away.

Amongst those individuals whom we mentioned as lounging in the precincts of the stage was one of whom it is necessary to say a few words. He was a man of about forty years of age, of sedate and even demure appearance, dressed in black, and looking thoroughly respectable. His white cravat and the absence of any shirt-collar gave him a certain air of sanctimoniousness, so that he seemed considerably out of place loitering in the wings of the opera and gazing at the ballet-dancers.

This individual immediately recognized Henrietta Leyden, though she knew him not; and even if she had bestowed on him a more observing look as she passed him by, she would not have remembered ever to have seen him before. He, however, had seen her, knew full well who she was, and

had his own reasons for being secretly rejoiced at encountering her there on the present occasion. He overheard every syllable which passed between herself and the ballet-master, and the circumstances of her simple narrative furnished him with a suggestion on which he at once resolved to act. Accordingly, while Henrietta lingered behind for the additional few minutes to converse with her late companions of the ballet, the individual of whom we have been speaking hurried away from the precincts of the stage, and threading the long, winding corridors, emerged from the building by the stage door in the Haymarket.

There he waited till Henrietta Leyden made her appearance, and the moment she issued from the theatre, the individual in question accosted her with every appearance of anxious haste.

" You are Miss Leyden, I presume ? " he said, in that quick tone and with that bustling manner which were full well calculated to throw her off her guard and make her at once fall into the snare which he was laying for her.

" Yes, that is my name," she answered, surveying him with mingled surprise and suspense.

" I thought so," he exclaimed. " You were so well described to me."

" By whom? " she asked, her suspense now mingling with alarm lest something had happened at home.

" By him who sent me hither, your benefactor, the old gentleman who visited your lodgings just now, and who promised to return for you at six o'clock."

" And he has sent you for me? " cried Henrietta. " Is there aught amiss? "

" No, nothing. Reassure yourself, be not alarmed. Everything is well. The explanation of my presence here is that your benefactor returned to your lodgings sooner than he intended, having an appointment for this evening which he had previously forgotten, and he has taken your mother and brother away to the new place provided for you all."

" How kind, how generous ! " ejaculated Henrietta. " But was he angry that I had gone out ? "

" Angry, no! But as it is not necessary for you to return to your old lodging, he has sent me to escort you to your new one. Come quick, miss, for I know that his time is

precious, and as I have to accompany him elsewhere, he will be waiting for me."

"I would not tax his patience for the world," said Henrietta.

During this rapid colloquy her companion had led her a little way up the street, and now he at once summoned a vehicle from the public stand. With every appearance of haste he himself officiously opened the door ere the driver could jump down. Henrietta was promptly handed in, her companion gave some quick instructions, spoken aside, to the coachman, then he entered the vehicle, the door was closed, the man leaped up again to his box, and away they went.

All that we have described, from the first instant that the individual accosted Henrietta at the door of the opera to that moment when she found herself seated by his side in the vehicle, had passed with such rapidity that she had not leisure for the slightest reflection. Her ideas had been kept in a whirl by the hurried, bustling, and almost anxiously impatient manner of her companion, so that there was not even a moment's leisure for a suspicion to start up in her mind. Nor for the first ten minutes during which the vehicle sped rapidly along did her companion allow her time to give way to reflection, but he went on expatiating upon the philanthropy of her benefactor, the many charities which he practised, the vast amount of good he did, and the delight he took in succouring the unfortunate. The young damsel was naturally charmed at hearing such encomia lavished upon the old gentleman, but gradually the thought stole into her mind that her present companion had not once mentioned the said old gentleman's name. Then, for the first time during this interview, she began to regard with some degree of attention the person seated by her side. When, however, she saw how respectable was his appearance, how free from anything savouring of treachery were his looks, and with what respectful sympathy he appeared to regard her, she again felt perfectly reassured. Then she ventured to ask where her new abode was situated, and her companion at once informed her that it was in one of the most delightful suburbs of London, namely, near the village of Hornsey. Henrietta thereupon remarked that it was very considerate on the part of her generous benefactor to have chosen so

salubrious a spot for her invalid mother, and this observation again furnished her companion with a topic for expatiation. In this manner he continued talking until the outskirts of London were reached on the northern side, and the vehicle was rolling along the road to Hornsey.

Now again did the young damsel begin to experience a revival of that vague misgiving which had previously arisen in her mind. Insensibly the idea stole upon her that her companion sustained so rapid and continuous a discourse in order to keep her attention engaged, and as this idea gained upon her, she could not help throwing at him dubious and uneasy looks. These, however, he did not appear to notice, but sought fresh topics for conversation; and though Henrietta had by this time ceased to answer him through the influence of her augmenting terrors, he still went on as volubly as ever.

Her alarm grew to an almost intolerable pitch. A secret voice whispered in the depths of her soul that all was not right; indeed, she felt like one betrayed into a snare. Again did she glance at her companion, and now she thought there was something sinister beneath the sedateness of his looks. But what was she to do? Suppose that, after all, everything he had said was correct, how insulting would it be alike to him and her benefactor if she were to manifest the suspicions which were so rapidly acquiring strength in her bosom. Henrietta accordingly made up her mind to see the adventure to its issue, no matter what that result might be, and she even endeavoured to appear cheerful and gay, and to resume her part in the discourse, so as to prevent her companion from fathoming her uneasiness.

The village of Hornsey was reached, and the vehicle, turning into a diverging road, stopped at the gate of a large and handsome-looking house. It stood a little way back, and was so embowered in tall and thickly umbrageous trees that all its extent could not be immediately discerned; but when the gate was opened by a gardener who was at work on the premises, and the vehicle passed up the shady avenue to the portico in front of the house, Henrietta at once found herself at the entrance of a mansion. The poignancy of her suspicions now shot with a galvanic pang through her heart, but the very next instant an idea sprang up in her mind giving incalculable relief. What if the

mansion really belonged to her benefactor, and that in the carrying out of his generous purposes he had resolved to afford her invalid mother, herself, and her little brother a home in this healthfully situated dwelling?

But she had not time for any further reflection. Her companion had sprung out of the vehicle, and giving her his hand, assisted her also to alight. Painfully balanced between hope and fear, trembling to advance, yet not daring to retreat, Henrietta stood for a few moments on the steps of the portico; and then, making up her mind with a desperate effort, she suffered herself to be conducted into the mansion.

A servant in splendid livery held the front door open, and she found herself in a hall paved with marble and embellished with statues. A noble ascent of staircase faced the front entrance, and a side door which stood open revealed the interior of a sumptuously furnished parlour. In short, the very first glimpse which the damsel thus obtained of these features of the mansion showed her that it was evidently the abode of wealth and luxury, and her heart sank within her. For now rushed the idea to her mind that it was by no means probable any man, and that man a complete stranger, would do so extraordinary generous a deed as to transfer herself and her relatives from a wretched attic to a palatial residence. It was a philanthropy belonging to romance and not to reality, such a change as one might read of in fairy tales, but not such as was wont to happen in the true world. All this occurred to Henrietta's mind in a moment, and she turned her terrified looks upon her companion. Now she thought she beheld a sardonic kind of smile blending indefinably with the sedateness of his countenance, and she felt inclined to cry out, but fear choked her utterance. At that instant a door facing the one which stood open afforded egress to an individual whom she instantaneously recognized but too well, and all her terrors being confirmed in a moment, she gave vent to a wild shriek, burst from the hold of her companion, and sprang toward the front door. But the footman in the gorgeous livery banged it violently, and the dread conviction smote her heart that she was a prisoner.

Almost frantic, with frenzied look and reeling brain, she turned around toward the individual whom she had recog-

nized; but a sudden dizziness came over her, she staggered, mechanically extended her arms to clutch at something that might save her from falling, and was received in the embrace of Lord Everton.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BEECH-TREE LODGE

Yes, it was a house belonging to Lord Everton to which Henrietta Leyden had thus been brought; he it was whom she had at once recognized as he issued from the apartment opening into the hall, and in his arms was it that she was received when consciousness abandoned her.

Let us pause for a few moments to give some necessary particulars. The individual who had entrapped the young damsel to Beech-tree Lodge — for so the mansion was named — was a confidential person in the service of his lordship. His name was Bellamy, — Mark Bellamy, as he was generally called by his patron. In certain respects he was treated with the familiarity of an equal, and was ostensibly the master of the house, as will hereafter be explained, though in reality it was Lord Everton's. Bellamy was a factotum, the ready instrument whereby Everton was enabled to carry out many of his dark, unhallowed purposes, and being deep in his lordship's confidence, he was largely recompensed. Though not exactly a gentleman by birth, he had nevertheless received a tolerably good education, and was of manners sufficiently agreeable; in addition to which, he possessed the consummate art of adapting himself to all circumstances and persons, as occasion might require. Having seen much of the world, he possessed a large experience in all its vices, hypocrisies, and villainies, and beneath the mask of a demure sedateness, assisted by a sanctimonious style of apparel, he concealed a disposition of the most heartless kind and a character stained by countless iniquities. Some weeks previously to the time of which we are writing, Lord Everton had mentioned to him the name of Henrietta Leyden, and had promised him a handsome reward if he

would by any possible treachery manage to inveigle that young girl to Beech-tree Lodge. Everton was so good a paymaster, and especially so bounteous where the gratification of his detestable passions was concerned, that Mark Bellamy had resolved to seize an early opportunity of directing his attention to the matter. Having made himself acquainted with Henrietta's personal appearance, he determined to watch her movements, and had accordingly proceeded, that very day of which we are speaking, to the opera-house in the Haymarket, to glean whatsoever might be useful to him in the furtherance of his design. We have seen how, by a coincidence, the train of circumstances favoured his views. The tale which he overheard Henrietta tell the ballet-master at once suggested to the fertile brain of Mark Bellamy a means of carrying out the enterprise, and he accomplished his purpose with success. As a matter of course, he knew nothing of the Leydens' benefactor; and his elaborate expatiations upon that gentleman's virtues were indeed intended, as Henrietta had surmised, to engross her attention and divert her thoughts from flowing into channels of suspicion and mistrust.

We may now pursue the thread of our story. When the unhappy girl came to herself, she found that she was reclining upon a sofa in that room whose sumptuous interior had caught her eyes when first entering the hall of the mansion. A middle-aged female, who had evidently been administering restoratives, was standing near. Henrietta threw a terrified look around, in the expectation of observing the detested old nobleman, but it was some relief to her distressed feelings to discover that she was alone in that room with the woman standing near her. A ray of hope flashed in upon her. Surely one of her own sex would not prove inaccessible to her entreaties for release? Inspired by the thought, she looked up into the woman's countenance to see if its aspect justified her hope, but this survey was only destined to experience the bitterest disappointment.

The woman was about six and forty years of age, and her features, which had evidently once been exceedingly handsome, bore the marks of the insatiate passions which had furrowed those lineaments long before the hand of time could have begun to trace deep wrinkles there. Even to the

innocent and inexperienced mind of the young maiden that countenance betrayed the evil nature of the woman's heart; it was the scorched, seared, and ruined veil which, instead of concealing, afforded an index to the desecration of the shrine within. Her hair was streaked with silver, but gave no venerable appearance to the face; on the contrary, it seemed a part of the remains of a beauty which even in the days of its glory had been fearful in itself, because associated with passions of the fiercest and most ungovernable nature. Her dark eyes still shone with a remnant of their former fires, but subdued to a lurid light, and at times bursting forth in sinister flashes, like the flame of a volcano seen through the pitchy darkness of a night of storm. Altogether she was a woman who appeared utterly incapable of one generous feeling, one holy idea, one tender sympathy, and it was in mingled horror and despair that poor Henrietta Leyden averted her looks and gave vent to her feelings in a sudden burst of anguish.

"Now, understand me, my pretty dear," said the woman, in a voice which had that loss of harmony almost amounting to hoarseness which is so frequently the result of a dissipated life on the part of females, "it is not of the slightest use for you to give way to any silly grief. Here you are, and here you will stop as long as it pleases his lordship; but I dare say that before long it will suit you well enough to remain here of your own accord."

"No, never, never!" shrieked forth Henrietta, as she sprang in wild frenzy from the sofa. "I would sooner perish than stoop to dishonour."

"Dishonour indeed!" echoed the woman, her thin, withered lips wreathing in supreme contempt mingled with scorn. "Have you got that silly word so ready for use on the tip of your tongue? Know you not that it is mere idle cant to use it? Dishonour indeed! If there be dishonour at all in the world, it is only to be found attached to poverty, and it is from poverty that you may be lifted up if you choose. However, we will not talk more upon the subject at present. I dare say that we shall have plenty of opportunities of expressing our opinions together on this and other points ere we separate."

"And is it really your intention," asked Henrietta, utterly reduced to despair by those last words, which augured a long

captivity for her, "to keep me a prisoner here in defiance of the law?"

"The law!" echoed the woman, with another scornful look, and this time it was accompanied by a still more sardonic laugh. "The law is only made to coerce the poor, and not to restrain the rich."

"Heavens! into whose power have I fallen?" cried Henrietta, wringing her hands in anguish as she sat down again on the sofa; for it really seemed to her as if a fiend in human shape, and not one of her own sex, were flinging these proud defiances alike at virtue and at legality.

"You have fallen into the hands of a nobleman who will ensure you against want for the rest of your days, and lavish all the advantages of wealth upon you," returned the woman, "provided that you willingly accept the destiny marked out for you. But if, on the other hand, you play the silly prude — However, I will not threaten you in respect to that alternative, because you have not been in the house as yet a quarter of an hour, and have passed through a fainting fit during that brief interval."

"Now, listen to me," said Henrietta, suddenly wiping the tears from her eyes, and speaking with firmness and energy. "I have a mother who has been very, very ill, and whose health is still most precarious. My prolonged absence from her may be followed by fatal consequences. I have a little brother, only seven years old, and if anything should happen to my poor mother, who is to take care of him while I am in captivity here? I conjure you, if you have the slightest spark of feeling in your breast, to suffer me to go hence, and I declare solemnly that I will take no step to punish the authors of this outrage. But if you refuse this prayer which I offer up, I warn you that I will exert every effort to summon succour to my aid. My screams and shrieks shall pierce beyond these walls, there are other houses at no great distance, the passers-by in the road must likewise hear me. Or, if these means fail, then will I watch the first opportunity to precipitate myself from a window, no matter what height from the ground. In short, I am desperate. You may think me a weak and powerless young girl, but the maddening nature of my thoughts will inspire me with the strength and the courage of a giantess."

"All this is remarkably fine, very heroic, and very roman-

tic indeed," observed the woman, with the cold irony of disdain. "The only misfortune is that your appeal to my sympathy is as useless as if you addressed yourself to one of the statues in the hall, and the accomplishment of your threats will prove somewhat more difficult than you imagine."

"Good heavens!" cried the wretched Henrietta, "is it possible that any one in female shape can proclaim herself as heartless as the cold, insensate marble? Woman, you must be a fiend, you must be a fiend!" she added, with an outburst of uncontrollable vehemence. "And as for what I have threatened to do, you cannot prevent me, no, you cannot prevent me. My screams shall raise the whole neighbourhood."

With these words, uttered in wild frenzy, Henrietta sprang toward the nearest window, but she recoiled with a sudden horror on observing that it was well provided with iron bars. Her agonizing glance was flung toward the two other windows which belonged to the same room, and at each did she observe a similar grating. Just Heaven! where was she? What prison was this? Reeling half-around with a frightful dizziness in her brain, the unhappy girl staggered to a seat, on which she sank down, and at the same moment the mocking laugh of that fiendlike woman rang in her ears.

"Now, Miss Leyden," said this dreadful creature, "do you begin to understand that your threats are all as ridiculous as your own silly prudery? There is not a window in the house which is not thus defended with iron bars, and therefore you will be spared the disagreeable alternative of self-destruction. As for your screams, you are quite welcome to open one of those windows and shriek forth till you lose your voice altogether. I can assure you that none of the neighbours will think of coming to your assistance. They will only wonder what poor maniac has been brought hither."

"A maniac!" echoed Henrietta, springing up from her seat as if galvanized with the light of the horrid truth which now flashed to her mind, "a maniac, did you say? What house, then, is this?" and her voice sank to a subdued and awe-inspired lowness of tone as she put the question.

"I do not intend to be too communicative, my pretty

dear," responded the woman, " but it may be that Mr. Bellamy — that is the gentleman who brought you hither — keeps a private lunatic asylum, where he from time to time receives patients — "

" Enough, enough! " interrupted Henrietta, hysterically; and again sinking down upon the seat, she covered her face with her hands, the tears gushing forth between her fingers.

" So you perceive," continued the woman, who appeared to take a devilish delight in making known to the young lady the utter hopelessness of her position, " that you will not be gratified with the facility of leaping from a window, nor will it be worth while to spoil your sweet voice by ineffectual screams. I would advise you to compose yourself, to make up your mind to the destiny which is inevitably yours; and whenever you think fit, I will conduct you to the apartments which you are to occupy. You need not hurry yourself, unless you like; I am in no hurry myself. Therefore, whether you come now or two or three hours hence, is not of the smallest consequence to me."

Henrietta pressed her fingers to her throbbing brows, and endeavoured to steady her thoughts. She saw the inutility of giving way to her anguish, and as the hope of escape was the only one which now remained to her, she thought that the sooner she made herself acquainted with the quarters to be assigned to her, the better. She accordingly wiped her eyes, struggled with a powerful effort to subdue the violence of her grief, and intimated to the woman that she was ready to accompany her.

" Just as you please," was the cold, ironical answer, and she who gave it forthwith conducted the young captive out of the room.

They passed into the hall, and thence ascended that handsome flight of stairs already mentioned. They reached a landing adorned with statues, vases, and paintings, and whence three or four doors opened into the apartments on that story.

But there they halted not; another ascent was mounted, another landing reached. Here the woman paused for a moment and glanced along the array of four doors which appeared on that story, as if she hesitated to which apartment she should assign the youthful prisoner. Her decision was, however, promptly made, and opening one of the doors,

she conducted Henrietta into a suite of three rooms, beautifully furnished.

These rooms opened one into another, and had no visible issue except the door on the landing by which they had just entered. The first apartment was evidently fitted up as the one where meals might be taken, the next was to serve the purpose of a drawing-room, and the third was a bedchamber. They all three had their windows at the back of the house, and these windows were barred. But the view therefrom was far more cheerful than that which the front of the house commanded, for these windows looked upon a beautiful garden in the rear of the building, stretching out to a considerable extent, and bounded by a shrubbery of evergreens, beyond which lay the green fields of the open country; and as all that neighbourhood is characterized by picturesque scenery, the view from the windows was altogether exceedingly beautiful. But what view can possess any charms for the captive who gazes upon it between iron bars?

"These are your apartments," said the woman. "In the cupboards and drawers of the bedchamber you will find plenty of changes of raiment, some of which will fit you as exquisitely as if made by a milliner to your shape. The toilet-table affords all appropriate requirements. In each room there are bell-pulls, and your summons will always be promptly answered. Your table shall be served with all dainties; everything shall be done to render you cheerful and contented, unless you resolve to be doggedly obstinate and perverse. In the middle room you may observe a number of books, some of which must doubtless suit your taste. When it strikes your fancy to take exercise, there is the garden at your service. All these pieces of information I give you by Lord Everton's command. There is no attempt to disguise from you the fact that you are a prisoner, at least for the present, but how long you may remain so depends entirely upon yourself. You comprehend me? And therefore your destiny is thus far in your own hands, that whereas you are now a captive in this house, you may become the free and happy mistress of it whenever you think fit. I need say no more."

The woman had been permitted to make this long speech without the slightest interruption on Henrietta's part,

because the young damsel was under the influence of too profound a terror, too paralyzing a consternation, to be able to interject a single word or comment. She sat down in a dull, dumb stupor, her eyes fixed vacantly in the direction of the window, beyond the iron bars of which stretched the smiling country, the verdure of the fields and trees all brilliant and glowing in the sunlight of the delicious summer evening. But Henrietta beheld not now that charming panorama of natural loveliness, dotted here and there with country mansions or picturesque cottages; the whole powers of her vision were turned inward, in concentrated survey of her own sad and well-nigh hopeless position.

The woman, perhaps imagining that the young captive had fallen into a fit of sullenness, turned slowly away, and passed out of the suite of rooms. As the outer door closed, Henrietta started up and listened. It was to catch whether that door was locked or bolted upon her. Poor thing! as if those who had taken the trouble to put bars up at the windows would forget to secure the door of the cage to which the young fluttering bird was consigned! Yes, the sounds of the key turning and the bolts drawing reached the damsel's ears, and then, with a sudden outburst of anguish, she wrung her hands violently, her bosom convulsing with sobs and her lips pouring forth the bitterest lamentations.

Oh, how dreary and dismal were the thoughts which now agitated in the brain of poor Henrietta! Would not her mother indeed have every apparent reason to suspect the worst, — she who was already so prone to suspicion? Crucifying reflection! and Heaven only knew how long a period was to elapse ere Henrietta would see her mother again and be enabled to tell all that had occurred. And, alas! still more excruciating reflection, was it destined that she should ultimately go forth pure and stainless from this mansion of infamy, or would not her ruin be assuredly consummated?

Unable to endure the torturing poignancy of these thoughts, Henrietta endeavoured to distract her attention by examining the apartments to which she had been consigned. She had another reason for entering on this survey, namely, to ascertain what chances there might be of a surprise on the part of Lord Everton during the night that was approaching. The reader has doubtless well comprehended

that it was a range of three rooms opening one into another, and entirely shut in from the rest of the house by the door that opened from the landing. She looked to see if there were any means of securing this door inside, and she found that there were. Yes, there was one of those little sliding bolts at the bottom part of the lock, and when this was secured, the door could not be opened from without save by violence, and therefore with a noise which could not fail to awaken her.

But was there no other means of communication with this suite of apartments? Minute and careful was Henrietta's scrutinizing search throughout the three rooms, but no other door save those between the apartments themselves or of the cupboards in the bedchamber, could she find. She examined the walls, likewise the woodwork inside the cupboards, looked under the bed and behind it, in short, left not a single nook or corner uninvestigated.

The result of this search was so far of an encouraging nature that she felt tolerably sure no attempt to surprise her in the night would be made; and, indeed, when she reviewed all that the woman had said to her, she came to the conclusion that it was Lord Everton's hope either to weary or persuade her into a compliance with his wishes. If such were the case, it at least promised her some days' leisure to devise means for escape; and feeling that this was her only chance, she said to herself, "It is useless for me to give way to grief, — indeed, worse than useless, for the result must be the exhaustion of my physical powers and the prostration of my mental ones. Let me summon all my fortitude to my aid, for Heaven only helps those who help themselves, and they who yield to despondency and despair go half-way toward meeting the crowning calamity."

Strengthened by these reflections, Henrietta grew more calm. She surveyed the prospect from the window, and then turned to examine the contents of the book-shelves. There were novels and poems and travels and some of the annuals, — in short, a miscellaneous collection of works, some of which were sufficiently suited to her taste. She took down a volume and endeavoured to read, but her thoughts were not yet properly collected nor her mind adequately tranquillized for such employment. She there-

fore laid aside the book, and gazed forth again from the windows.

She heard the village church of Hornsey proclaim the hour of seven, and then the outer door of her apartments was opened. A female servant made her appearance, bearing a tea-tray. Henrietta was greatly relieved on observing that it was not the same fearful-looking woman whom she had previously seen, but still there was nothing in the appearance of this servant to give her any hope of making her a friend. She was a thin, sharp-visaged, cross-looking woman, of about thirty, with that decided compression of the lips which seemed to imply that she thought it probable the young captive might appeal to her, but that she had a negative answer ready to give.

Henrietta did not therefore speak a word to this woman, but when she had retired the young damsel gladly partook of the refreshing beverage she had brought up. In half an hour the servant returned to take away the things, and she then said, " It was his lordship's intention to pay his respects to you this evening, but sudden business has compelled him to go into town, and therefore you will not see him till to-morrow."

" Does his lordship habitually live here? " asked Henrietta.

" No, of course not. I suppose you are aware that he has got a beautiful house in Belgrave Square."

" I know nothing of his lordship's circumstances," said Henrietta. " Pray who is the person who brought me up to these rooms? "

" Oh, the housekeeper, you mean," rejoined the servant, with a peculiar expression of countenance as she spoke. " You may call her Mrs. Martin when you want to address her by name, and, for my part, I answer to the name of Susan. Yours, I believe, is Miss Leyden? "

" Yes," replied Henrietta. Then, after a pause, she asked, though somewhat hesitatingly, " Are there many people in this house? I mean, any others besides myself, in the same position? "

Susan looked very hard at Henrietta for a few moments, as if to fathom her reason for asking this question, and then she abruptly replied, " No, none." There was another brief pause, and then she asked, " At what time do you like

to have supper, and have you any particular orders to give about it?"

"I shall require nothing more this evening," responded Henrietta.

The woman took up the tea-tray and issued from the room, locking and bolting the door behind her.

Two more hours passed, tediously and anxiously enough, for Henrietta could not help keeping her thoughts constantly riveted upon her mother and brother, who must be so cruelly afflicted at her absence. And then her benefactor, too, — that old gentleman with whose name she herself was unacquainted, — what would he think of her disappearance? Would he still carry out his benevolent plans in respect to providing a new lodging for her invalid mother and little Charley, or would he look with so much suspicion on her mysterious disappearance as to abandon in disgust any further development of his charity in that quarter?

We need not, however, dwell any longer upon poor Henrietta's reflections. The reader can be at no loss to imagine what she felt or endured in the first hours of her captivity.

At nine o'clock, when the dusk set in, Susan made her appearance with candles, and also with a tray covered with sandwiches, cakes, fruits, and wine, intimating "that Mrs. Martin had ordered her to bring up these refreshments in case Miss Leyden might choose to partake of them." She then asked if she required anything more, and on receiving a reply in the negative, wished Henrietta good night and departed.

The young damsel now secured the door by means of the sliding bolt above referred to, and as an additional precaution she placed a chair slantwise against the lock. When the clock of Hornsey church struck ten, she resolved to retire for the night. She was thoroughly exhausted in mind and body, and was, moreover, anxious to seek refuge from her unpleasant reflections in the oblivion of slumber. The door of communication between the dining-room and drawing-room was furnished with a key, and she therefore locked it. In the same manner did she secure the door between the drawing-room and the bedchamber, and thus she felt convinced that her rest could not possibly be disturbed by any

stealthy intrusion. Having laid aside her apparel and said her prayers, Henrietta sought her couch, where, notwithstanding the bitterness of her thoughts, sleep soon fell upon her eyes.

END OF VOLUME XI.